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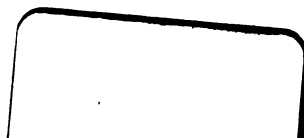
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THE UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH.

A VISIT
TO
THE NEW FOREST
A TALE

BY
HARRIET MYRTLE,
AUTHOR OF "THE WATER-LILY," "THE OCEAN CHILD," ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED WITH TWENTY-FIVE ENGRAVINGS, FROM DRAWINGS BY WILLIAM HARVEY,
GEORGE THOMAS, BIRKET FOSTER, AND HARRISON WEIR.

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P R E F A C E .



WHEN we read, that in those olden times in which the Romans invaded Britain, the country was nearly covered with forests and morasses, it is difficult to picture to ourselves what it looked like, and how the people lived and went on—so different is it now. Perhaps the adventures of the young party, whose visit to the New Forest is related in the following tale, may help to suggest how some of these things were. It must often have been much more difficult then to travel three or four miles than as many hundreds now. A narrow marsh frequently prevented a weary traveller from reaching some place of rest, which he could plainly see; and as to a river of any breadth or depth, it must have been a more effectual barrier than *we* find in the great Atlantic Ocean.

H. M.

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A VISIT TO THE NEW FOREST.

CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT INVITATION.

“Do you think mamma will let us go?”

“It would be such fun!”

“Fun! It would be delightful! Much more than fun!”

“It would be delightful, and nice, and merry, and happy, and everything!”

It was a letter that had just arrived by post that caused all these exclamations.

“Read it again, Mary,” cried Edward.

“How is it directed?” asked little Kitty. “Are you sure it means that we are all to go?”

“Yes; she says ‘all’ of us. Of course, it is only directed to me, because I am the eldest. It is directed ‘Miss Murray.’ She could not put Miss Murray, Miss Catherine Murray, Master Frederick and Master Edward

Murray, all in a row. There would have been no room for the direction. But she says 'all.'"

"Give it to me, and let me look," said Fred.

"No, no; read it out loud again," repeated Edward.

"Now listen, then," said Mary; and she began to read, while the rest collected round her to hear every word of this exciting letter.

"RINGWOOD COTTAGE, HAMPSHIRE,
"May 15th, 1858.

"MY DEAR MARY,—I think you know that when papa and mamma went to Scotland last month, they intended that, when Harry and George came home for the holidays, we should all three go down by sea and join them there; but things have happened which prevent this happy plan from taking place. I was terribly disappointed at first; indeed, it was all I could do to bear it. But mamma knew that, and to comfort me, she has thought of such a nice thing; and so I write to tell you about it, and if your mamma will consent, I think we should be very happy all 'together.'"

"That I am sure we should," exclaimed Edward.

"Hush! Don't interrupt," said Fred.

Mary went on reading:—

"Will you ask your mamma if she will let you all"—

"You hear, *all*"—"come here next Tuesday week to spend a month with us three. Mrs. Allen has promised to let Margaret and Constance come, and our cousins Walter, John, and Janey, will be able to come every day, because they live so near; so we should be twelve, and could get up some nice games, and have riding, boating, and different things. Nurse takes care of everything for mamma while she is away, and would look after us, and keep us in order, you know, tell your mamma. Indeed, sometimes we cannot help laughing at the way she goes on, just as if we were still little children, instead of Harry being twelve, and I thirteen, as I am. Then Aunt Fanny is always at home, and has promised to come every day, and see how we go on, and help us to arrange our excursions, and everything. She is not strong enough to go with us often, but she is so kind, she will give us good advice how to manage well. So do try to come, and do write as soon as you can, and tell me if your mamma consents, for I am quite impatient to know; and you must not disappoint me.

"Your affectionate friend,

"ALICE HOPE."

Having read the letter through, and consulted a little how it would be best to begin, so as to persuade their

mamma to consent, Mary, Kitty, Fred, and Edward went in a body to the drawing-room, and with beating hearts and anxious faces, watched her countenance as she read. She shook her head at first, at which a pang shot through them all, and Kitty took hold of her hand, and was going to say something, only Mary whispered to her, "She has not got to what Alice says about nurse yet." A smile soon began to appear, and after she had not only got to what Alice said about nurse, but about Aunt Fanny, too, she looked at the anxious faces round her, and, to the joy of all, gave her consent, only reminding them that she trusted to their behaving well and sensibly, and each trying to promote the happiness of all.

"But cannot you come too, mamma?" asked little Kitty; and the wish was echoed by every one as they threw their arms round her, and thanked her, and looked into her loving eyes.

She said it was impossible this year, as Mrs. Hope knew; but that it had already been fixed that next year they should all go together. "And you must describe it to me, you know," she added, "when you come back, so that I may know what to expect."

A note was sent that very day from Mary to Alice,

joyfully accepting. The preparations for the visit commenced. Lessons were finished up, farewell calls to friends and neighbours paid, and at last the wished-for morning came, and after an early dinner the happy party were seated in the train that was to take them out of noisy, smoky London, to the green fields and shady trees of the country.

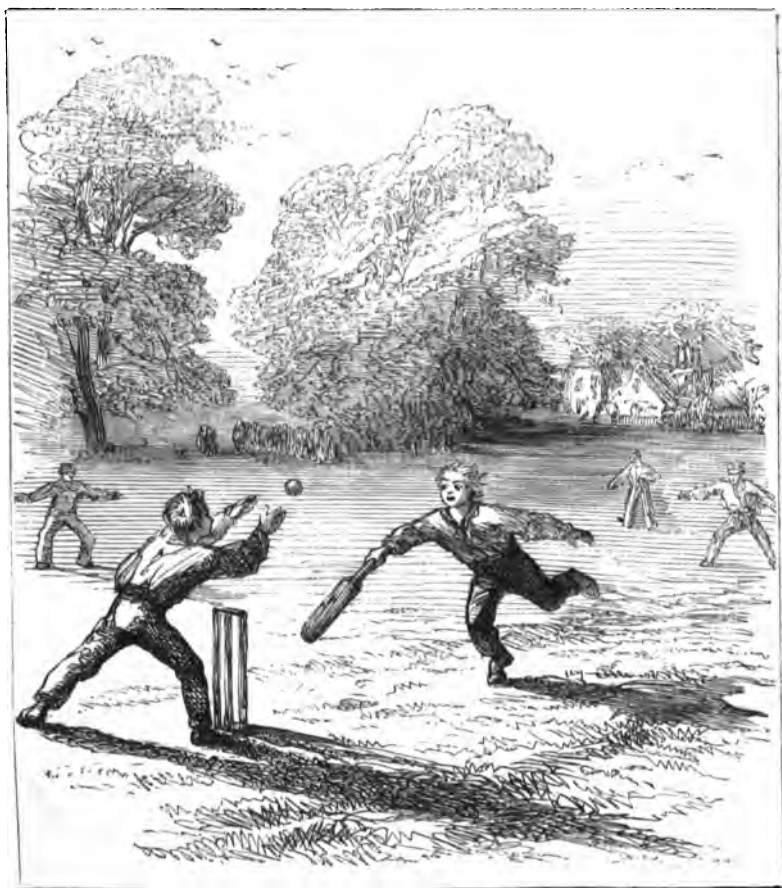
After a journey of about four hours, they stopped at the station nearest to Mr. Hope's cottage, and found a pony carriage waiting for Mary, Kitty, and the luggage, and a pony each for Fred and Edward.

It was a lovely, bright evening. As they drove along, Fred and Edward cantering by their side, the two sisters sat enjoying the delicious freshness of the air, the sight of the wild flowers, the songs of the birds, the green grass in the fields, the animals feeding in them, the clean, cheerful cottages. No one who lives in the country knows what it is to go there after long living in a large town.

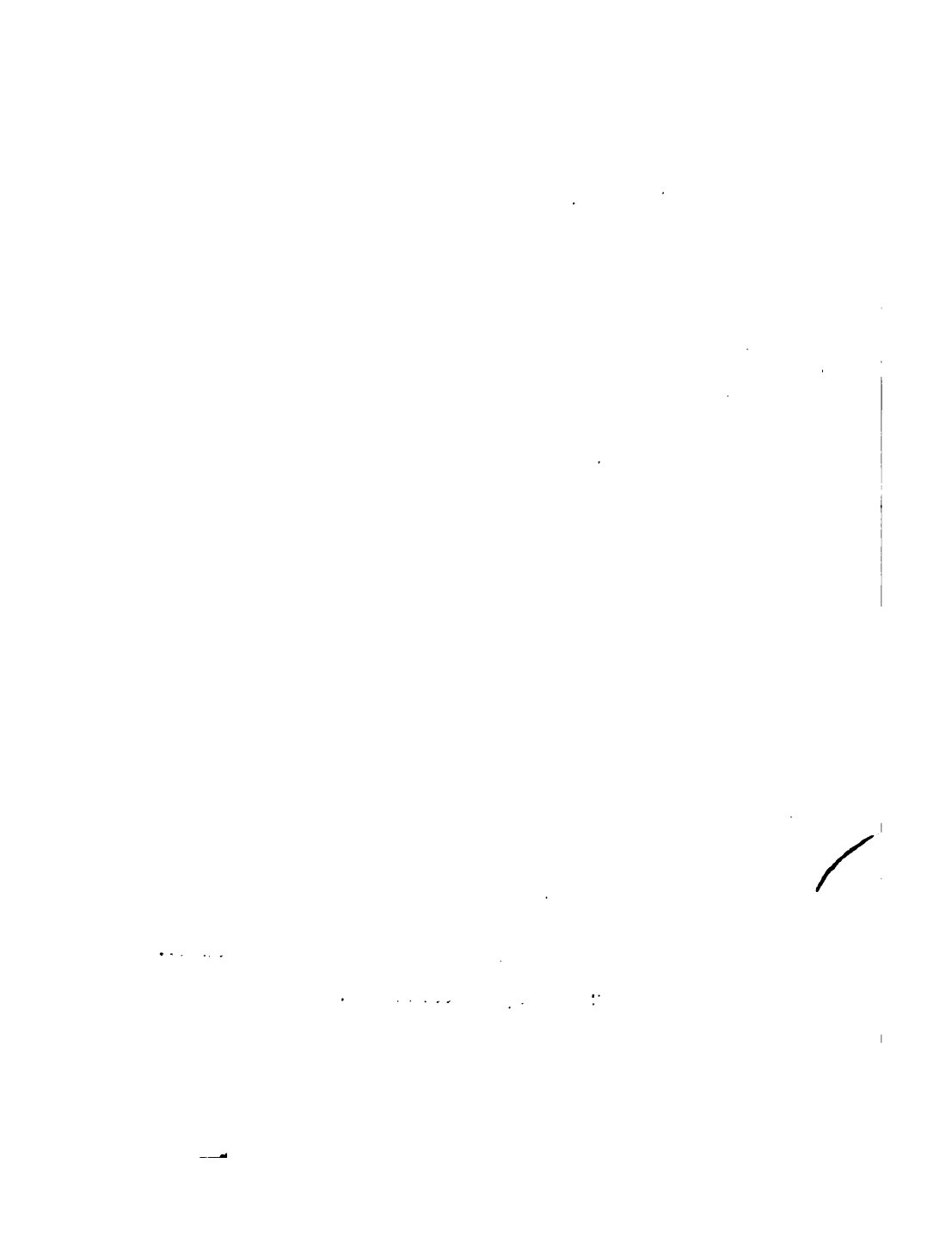
Our party had never seen Ringwood Cottage; so they began to speculate about which it was, as they passed one pretty place after another, and to ask the old coachman who drove them "if that was it?" or "if it was as large as *that*?" or "as beautiful as the other?"

"You will know when you come near, young ladies, I am thinking," said he, at last; "for it is my belief we shall hear them a-shouting and a-laughing over their cricket in the field."

At the sound of cricket, the two boys put their ponies up to their speed, the carriage went faster to keep up with them, and in five minutes they went in at a gate that stood wide open, to show it was expecting them, trotted along between two walls of evergreens, turning a corner, found themselves in the midst of a joyous assemblage, and alighting, saw Alice, who came eagerly forward to receive and welcome them.



THE FÊTE AT BINGWOOD COTTAGE.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST EVENING.

THE cottage stood on a soft green sward, shaded by lofty trees. It was very pretty, being irregular in form, with white walls and thatched roof. Beautiful roses, honeysuckles, and other climbing plants, grew on it, and there were flower-beds near the windows, which opened to the ground. A large party, chiefly of boys, was collected under the trees. It was the first day of the holidays at the school to which Harry and George belonged, and they had asked all their schoolfellows who did not go home to a distance to come and play cricket, and have tea and a strawberry feast in the evening.

Harry and George left their game as soon as they saw that their guests had arrived; and there was a great shaking of hands, and rejoicing that they had met again. Alice took them in, as soon as the first welcome was over, to take off their travelling dresses, and have tea. There they found Mrs. Hastings, the mother of Walter, Jack, and Janey, who was the "Aunt Fanny" of Alice's letter. Oh! how pretty and sweet the cottage seemed to the London children, and how kind Aunt Fanny was to them!

The drawing-room was full of sweet scents from the flowers outside the windows, as well as from some lovely plants in baskets, and several bouquets in glasses and jars placed about the tables.

“If we only had papa and mamma and your mamma with us,” said Alice, “we should be quite happy; but we cannot have everything we wish for, and that is to come next year.”

She took them to their rooms up-stairs next, and helped them to take off their dusty hats and cloaks. Again, how sweet and fresh it seemed as they went up the oak staircase, and still more in their rooms, with the white curtains, and everything so bright and sweet.

They could hardly spare time to take as much refreshment as Aunt Fanny wished, for they were so impatient to be out on the lawn. Fred and Edward were soon among the cricket-players, and found out their old friends, Walter and John, or Jack, as he was always called. Their sister Janey was well known to Mary and Kitty, and Margaret and Constance Allen were introduced to them as new acquaintances.

The girls had quite enough to do helping Alice to entertain her brothers' party, and did not play any games themselves; but there was plenty of pleasure for them.



KITTY AND GEORGE FEED THE SWANS.

There was a tent, where a table was spread with cakes and strawberries, and merry parties were constantly collecting there. Then there was the garden, with its beautiful flowers, to look at, and the shady paths in the wood, and the summer-house, and the swing; but, above all, they admired the walks by the river. Here little George and Kitty, who soon made friends, were found seated at the root of a tree, feeding the swans and wild ducks, and other water-birds. The graceful white swans came arching their necks, and ruffling their feathers, quite near Kitty, for they were very tame, from Alice having made a habit of feeding them; then, as she threw the food on the water, they sailed away rapidly, and ate it with their great black beaks. Kitty was obliged to drive them away sometimes, or the poor little ducks would have got nothing. She was so happy that she could scarcely bear to come away; but the sun had set, and the party was dispersing; so she was obliged to make up her mind to go in.

It had been a very pleasant day. Mary put her little sister to bed as soon as all were gone, feeling that, as Alice had said, if only the dear friends who were absent were there, she should be quite happy; and before she also lay down to rest, she took out her desk, and wrote to her mamma to tell her so.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST MORNING

LITTLE Kitty awoke early, and when she looked round, and remembered where she was, she started up to look out at the window.

“Oh, Mary, awake, and come!” she cried. “There is a field all over buttercups; and I can see the river behind the trees; and I can see a swan; and there are white butterflies skimming about over the field. I shall dress with all my might, and get out as fast as I can.”

Kitty was soon dressed and out, and Mary was not long after her. It was a lovely morning, fresh and clear; the dew lay on the grass, the birds were singing, and scents from trees and flowers filled the air.

Mary found Alice already in the garden, gathering fresh flowers for the drawing-room, and was delighted to help her. The roses were in full beauty; mignonette, geraniums of many varieties and colours, sweet peas, and many pretty annuals made splendid bouquets. While they were cutting the flowers, Kitty, George, and Edward came out of the kitchen-garden, loaded with cabbage-



HARRY'S RABBITS.

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leaves for Harry's rabbits. They said Walter and Jack had come over to breakfast, and were with Fred and Harry looking at the rabbits, and had sent them for leaves.

Kitty said the rabbits were such pretty creatures that Mary must really come and look at them ; but Mary was too busy with the flowers at this minute, so Kitty stopped to describe them. "There was," she said, "a lovely white one, with black eyes and ears. Harry told her white rabbits generally had pink eyes, but he did not think pink eyes nearly so pretty as black. What do you think, Mary?" she asked.

Mary thought black eyes must be much prettier.

Then the other old rabbit was brown and white. Kitty thought she did not like it quite so much as the white one. But there were four young ones ! One was white, with black eyes and ears like its mother. Oh, it was so pretty ! Just like a little soft white ball ; and another was dark brown ; and the other two brown and white.

"You *will* come and see them by-and-bye, Mary ? What lovely flowers ! Do let me smell them. They are delicious ! Yes, George, I'm coming. I must go, because Harry said we were to be quick ; so good-bye."

And Kitty bustled away with her basket full of leaves, while Alice and Mary went in with their flowers, which took a long while to arrange in their glasses, and vases, and baskets, in the drawing-room, and dining-room, and breakfast-room, and lobby; for there were flowers everywhere. Constance and Margaret, however, had come down by this time, and helped them. Alice was very skilful from long practice, and the others worked under her, and submitted everything to her finishing touch. Scarcely was all done when the breakfast-bell sounded, and nurse appeared to see that no one had wet feet, and to beg that the young gentlemen would scrape their shoes before they came in, and hang their hats in their proper places; and, whatever Alice might think, nurse was very right in her precautions. Jack especially, being a careless fellow, was rushing in without attending to any such preliminaries, when she caught him and stopped him.

All breakfast-time they discussed and deliberated over the plans for the day. One recommended an excursion to Stony Cross, to visit the spot where William Rufus was killed by the arrow from the bow of Sir Walter Tyrrell, more than seven hundred and fifty years ago; another thought boating would be the best; another

wanted to stay near home and play games. Before anything could be fixed, however, Alice said she must know when Aunt Fanny would be able to come. Walter replied that his mother told them to say she could be with them to an early dinner. It was finally settled that until she arrived they should remain near home; because to Mary and Kitty, Fred and Edward, everything was new, and it was best they should see all there was to be seen near home first; and that some of them should go and meet Aunt Fanny and escort her to dinner, and afterwards take her advice as to how to spend the afternoon and evening.

This being happily arranged, they spread themselves about to enjoy the pleasures of home, and the garden and woods that surrounded it, according to the taste of each. Kitty could scarcely wait till Mary had finished breakfast before paying another visit to the rabbits, and showing them to her.

"Did I say they were too pretty? Are they not little darlings?" she asked.

Mary said they were very pretty. Kitty had not said at all too much in praise of them.

Would Mary wait there while she ran to the garden

for a few more leaves, that she might show her how funnyly they would nibble the edges ?

Mary promised to wait, and sat down outside while Kitty ran for the leaves. Harry, meanwhile, arrived, and said he was going to exercise the young ones. This he did by throwing a small piece of cabbage stalk among them. One seized it instantly ; on which the other three tried to take it away, chasing the fortunate possessor of this treasure round and round, jumping over it, and trying in every way to get at it. Mary laughed ; but Kitty, when she came back, could not bear to see them teased, and almost began to cry about it ; so Harry let her throw in her leaves, and the cabbage stalk was soon forgotten, and the rabbits, young and old, began to enjoy their abundance in harmony and good fellowship.

Mary was next taken to see the swans again ; and it was so beautiful by the river side that all the girls soon congregated there. Constance ran in for their little baskets and bags ; they sat on trees, roots, and stumps, and worked while one read. The weather was warm ; and the birds singing among the branches, the hum of the insects, and the gentle rippling of the water, made delightful music.

But the music was interrupted by a voice of woe.



DEATH OF THE SQUIRREL.

"Oh, Mary, look here! Isn't it a pity? Come and see if you cannot bring it to life!"

Mary jumped up to see what was the matter, and Edward came running through the trees carrying between his hands a dead squirrel. He and George had been climbing trees, he said, and he saw a squirrel jumping from one branch to another, so he ran after it through the woods. He never saw anything so pretty as the way it went on. By-and-by he heard some voices, and he thought it was George or some of the others; but when he came up it was two strange boys throwing sticks up at two other squirrels. So, while he was looking, they hit one and it fell down on the grass, but the other got away, and so did that one he was looking at first. It ran off over the ground somewhere. The boys only laughed at him for looking so rueful about it, and told him he might have it to stuff. "But don't you think you could bring it to life, Mary?" he asked again.

Mary took it in her hand, and felt it; but its poor little head drooped down, and its pretty paws were stretched out stiffly. She shook her head, and said it was quite dead, and would never jump from branch to branch any more.

Kitty was very much grieved about it. The tears did really flow down now, and fell upon the poor little brown creature which she laid on her frock.

"Look at its large black eyes and its lovely tail," she said. "Why did the boys kill it? What harm was it doing to them?"

Alice said it was only mischief, and a love of hunting creatures, that most boys seem to have; and, to drive away the sadness that had come over Kitty and Edward, she asked them, if they did not think they had better bury this poor little thing in some shady place. So they found a mossy bank under a beech tree, and dug a hole with sticks, and laid the squirrel in it, covered him over with the earth, and piled a thick bed of moss over him.

Then Alice took Kitty on her lap, and said how glad she was that the other two squirrels had escaped; and that they were most likely high up in some tree now, enjoying themselves very much. "You see, Kitty," said she, "this is just the time for them to play and enjoy themselves, eating twigs, and fir cones, and whatever they can find. In autumn they have to work, to store up a provision in some hollow tree against the cold winter weather."

"What do they store up?" asked Kitty, wiping her eyes, and beginning to look bright and interested.

"Nuts, and beech mast, and such things; and in very cold and bad weather they do not come out much, but stay at home quietly and eat their store. Then in spring they build a nest for their young ones in the forked branches of some tree, and find plenty of food about for them and themselves. But, oh, Kitty! I must tell you such a funny thing Harry and I saw one morning."

"Oh, yes, do tell me!" said Kitty, settling herself comfortably on Alice's lap, while Edward came close to her side.

"It was in winter, and it was snowing fast. The trees were loaded with snow, and especially the fir-trees, which held it among their stiff-pointed dark-green leaves. Well, high up on one of the fir-trees, opposite the breakfast-room window, we saw two squirrels seated, eating fir cones. They sit upright on a branch, and pick off a cone with their front paws; then they pick out the scales, just as we pick the leaves out of an artichoke, and nibble out the seed at the bottom, and then throw the rest on the ground. They look so pretty. You can see their bright round eyes, and their pointed ears, both on the alert, in

case any danger should be near, while they pick scale after scale off and nibble away."

"How I should like to see them!" said Kitty.

"Very likely you may while you are here. Well, but these two squirrels, you know, were out in the snow. But as they did not like to get wet, they had provided themselves with umbrellas."

"Alice!" exclaimed Edward, rather incredulously.

"They had folded their bushy tails over their backs and heads. So there they sat eating away, their tails piled thickly—several inches thick—with the white snow, and their bodies and heads dry and comfortable. So, you see, as soon as they had eaten enough, all they would have to do would be to whisk their tails down, shake off the snow, and pop down into some hole in the tree."

"Did you see them whisk their tails?" asked Kitty.

No; Alice could not wait to see them, but she felt sure they did.

"I wish I had seen them," said Kitty.

"Look how the swans and ducks come swimming round us, as if they wanted some food. Have you any more for them, Kitty?"

Kitty had given them every scrap she had; so Alice



THE WATER NYMPH.

told her she might go and ask the cook for any bits of broken bread she had, and a little corn. Kitty felt rather shy about going to the cook, much as she wished to get this food; so Constance good-naturedly jumped up, and taking her hand, ran off with her along the path through the trees, and then little Kitty felt quite at her ease.

It seemed long before they returned. The swans and ducks grew tired of waiting, and swam off, and once or twice Edward had made excursions homeward to look for them, then loitered near the river, throwing in stones to pass the time.

"Here they come! I see them!" he cried, at last. "Oh! I should like to get in with them!"

As he spoke, a boat came gliding along, rowed by Fred and Jack—Constance, Kitty, and George seated in the stern.

"Here we are! Look at us, Mary!" cried Kitty, as they drew near. "You are all to come in, and have a row; and we can throw the food out on the water as we go along."

The whole party was soon seated in the boat, Kitty informing Edward that it was called the "Water Nymph," and making him observe how prettily it was painted in

green and white. Fred was a practised oarsman, having rowed on the Thames, and Jack was also expert; so they made the boat skim along. They passed beautiful spots, sometimes passing under the branches that overhung the water, sometimes seeing distant views along the glades of the forest; once they caught a glimpse of a large herd of deer, to the great delight and admiration of the Londoners. Meanwhile, they threw some of the food Kitty had brought to the swans and ducks whenever they came near. There seemed no end to the pleasure, and it was hardly possible to believe that so much time had passed, when Alice said it was nearly one, and they must go home to get ready for dinner. So the "Water Nymph" was safely moored in the boat-house, and as they walked towards the cottage, they saw the pony-carriage bringing Aunt Fanny. Harry and Walter had driven to her house to bring her, that she might have no fatigue, and might be able to accompany them all on a little excursion in the forest after dinner.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD TIMES AND NEW.

THE slanting rays of the sun were beaming through the leaves of the ancient trees, when our party, after a delightful walk, collected on the slope above Stony Cross, and found the pony-carriage, with Aunt Fanny and Fred, who had driven her there, waiting for them. They put up the pony-carriage at the inn near, and all went together to the spot so well known in history. A triangular stone stands there with an inscription on each of its sides:—

1. "Here stood the oak on which an arrow, shot by Sir Walter Tyrrell at a stag, glanced and struck King William the Second, surnamed Rufus, in the breast, of which he instantly died, on the second of August, A.D. 1100."

2. "King William the Second, surnamed Rufus, being slain, as is before related, was laid in a cart belonging to one Purkess, and drawn from hence to Winchester, and was buried in the cathedral church of that city."

3. "A.D. 1745. That the place where an event so memorable had happened might not be hereafter unknown, this stone was set up by John Lord Delawar, who has seen the tree growing in this place."

Reading the inscriptions set them talking about old

times. Aunt Fanny told them that the village of Minstead, a mile off, is said to have received its name from the exclamation of Rufus when he fell from his horse, "O myne stede!"

Kitty said it was a long time ago that all that happened, and she could not think why it was called the "New Forest."

Fred laughed, and told her he did not wonder she thought so, but that it was "new" in the time of William Rufus, because William the Conqueror made it.

Aunt Fanny then went on to tell them, that when William the Conqueror made this forest, he already had sixty-nine forests, thirteen chases, and seven hundred and fifty parks, in different parts of England, all stocked with game, in which the king only and such of his nobles and followers as he chose had a right to hunt; and yet he was not satisfied, but laid waste all the country hereabouts, thirty miles in length, destroying towns, villages, churches, mansion-houses, and cottages, and stocking it with deer and other game. These were dreadful cruelties to commit, all for the love of hunting.

Everybody agreed to this, and Mary said she was glad we did not live in those times.



A FOX HUNT.



"Whatever else has changed," observed Fred, "the love of hunting lasts still."

Aunt Fanny replied, that was true; "but," she added, "though it is true that in our days gentlemen hunt foxes and deer, yet the fierce spirit is gone out of the sport. The forest laws were dreadfully severe; death, cruel maiming, and imprisonments, and fines, were inflicted for killing the deer or smaller game, or even trespassing, and taking the *vert*, as the wood was called. The game laws which have succeeded are growing milder continually, and only three or four of the forests remain of all there once were; and these are open to everybody, and have become delightful and beautiful places to enjoy."

"Robin Hood was the fellow!" said Jack. "He killed the deer in spite of the king and all his laws."

"What would you say to our reading the beginning of Sir Walter Scott's 'Ivanhoe' as we sit here in this forest, under the trees? I brought the book, thinking you might like it."

An unanimous vote of approval proceeded from all present.

"We cannot anywhere find in so small a space so perfect an idea of England as it then was. He is describing

Sherwood Forest, you know—not the New Forest; but that matters little. You have nearly all read it, I dare say.”

All had read it but little George and Kitty; but all would like to hear it now.

So Aunt Fanny opened the book, and while the little party gathered round her, some seated on tree stumps, others on the mossy turf, she began to read that beautiful description of an ancient forest so well known; and as they looked round, it seemed as if they were transported back to that old time, so exact was the picture.

“The sun was setting upon one of the rich grassy glades of that forest which we have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Hundreds of broad short-stemmed oaks, which had witnessed, perhaps, the stately march of the Roman soldiery, flung their broad, gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious greensward; in some places they were intermingled with beeches, hollies, and copse-wood of various descriptions, so closely as totally to intercept the level beams of the sinking sun; in others, they receded from each other, forming those long sweeping vistas, in the intricacy of which the eye delights to lose itself, while imagination considers them as the paths to yet wilder scenes of sylvan solitude. Here the red rays of the

sun shot a broken and discoloured light that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees, and there they illuminated in brilliant patches the portions of turf to which they made their way."

Mrs. Hastings continued to read, going on to the description of Gurth, the swineherd, as he stood in the glade, clothed in a jerkin, which descended to his knees, made of some animal's skin, with a hole cut in it for his head; and no other clothing summer and winter; his feet in wooden sandals; his legs bound with leather thongs; and a metal collar round his throat, on which was engraved his name, "Gurth, the born thrall (or serf) of Cedric of Rotherwood." Then to the description of Wamba, the jester, also with his collar, declaring him to be a "born thrall." She read of poor Gurth's difficulty in collecting his swine, because the keepers had cut off the claws of his dog to prevent his attacking the deer. Then followed the meeting with the cavalcade, consisting of the Prior of St. Aylmer's, gay, richly-dressed, and sleek, on his ambling mule, with his attendant monks, and the Knight Templar on his war-horse, come home from the Holy Land, with his fierce-looking followers, heavily armed. Then the rude hospitality at the house of

the Saxon thane, and the dread prevalent of the cruelty and oppression of the Norman nobles, entrenched in their feudal castles, full of their lawless retainers. Then, passing over the intermediate parts, she read about Robin Hood and his merry men, who fled to the forests to resist them,

“That was the England of seven hundred years ago,” said Aunt Fanny. “Now we may see, in a few solitary places like this, a party of gipsies under the trees, but we have no outlaws. Instead of ‘born thralls,’ we have free labourers, with their cottages and gardens. Feudal castles have changed into the beautiful mansions and parks of our aristocracy; distinctions between Norman and Saxon are forgotten in the one name of Englishman. Knights, monks, priors, have vanished. Only three or four of the old forests remain, and this is the only one of these few that keeps something of its original character. Where these wild regions once stretched out, inhabited only by game, and used for nothing but the pleasure of the king and his nobles, we have cultivated fields, gardens, houses, villages, and large towns and cities. We have thriving manufactures and arts of which they never dreamed; our ships cover the seas, and trade to countries



GIPSIES IN THE FOREST.

of which they were totally ignorant. We are clothed, and lodged, and fed better than they ever imagined of."

"We have no Knights Templars," said Harry, "but we have wars still."

"That is too true," she replied, "and so it is true that though we have not 'born thralls,' we have paupers, and beggars, and over-tasked labourers; but yet, on the whole, there is a grand improvement since those days, and a spirit of peace and progress is spreading among us faster and faster. May you all, each as you have power and opportunity, help it onward, dear children."

CHAPTER V.

HAYMAKING.

THE field, "all over buttercups," which had delighted Kitty's eyes when first she looked out of her bed-room window, was now ready to cut; and the delights of hay-making began. On a warm sunny morning, the sound of the mowers whetting their scythes was heard, and by six o'clock the greater number of the inhabitants of Ringwood Cottage were astir. Two men had been at work since three, so that by the time all were dressed and out, there were a great many swathes of grass lying on the ground. Still it was too soon to begin turning it. The mowers said it must lie as it was till about twelve o'clock; but then, if the sun continued to shine as it did now, the sooner it was turned the better. So now they could only run about and enjoy the delicious scent of the cut grass, and have fun as usual—which they never found very difficult—and go in again to breakfast.

By twelve o'clock Alice and Harry had provided hay-forks and rakes enough for every one, and led the way into the field, and set everybody to work. There was



WORK AND PLAY.

plenty to do, turning over every swathe and raking up what was scattered; and plenty to do in scattering it again, by playing all sorts of tricks and gambols among the grass.

As it was extremely warm, and the sun beamed down both on grass and haymakers, the grass dried fast, and the haymakers often had to take refuge under the trees; but they could not bear to go in; and, to indulge them, nurse spread a table for them in a shady corner of the field, and there they had a cold dinner, sending good platefuls to the two mowers, who were also resting for their dinner-hour; and to the gardener and his boy, who were assisting in haymaking, and seated by the mowers. Happy as every day had been, they thought this the happiest of all, and they worked so well after dinner that the whole field had been turned by tea-time; the mowers having finished their part by about four o'clock.

This pleasant work lasted several days; indeed, nearly a week; for there was rain sometimes, and then everything that had been done had to be undone and put up new. If the grass was in small cocks they must be taken to pieces, spread over the field, raked into ridges, and then, before night, put up in cocks again. Many

anxious looks were cast at the clouds, and many a time was the barometer consulted, for they had a pride in getting up the hay quickly and in good condition, that when Mr. and Mrs. Hope came home they might admire the haystack. Of course it could not be a large haystack, like the farmers', or like Mr. Grey's two splendid ones last year, Alice said, but she wanted it to be very good hay.

At last Collins, the gardener, who took the management of all out-door concerns at Ringwood Cottage, and was therefore looked up to as chief authority about the hay, was satisfied that it was ready to stack. It was put up in large hay-cocks over night; next morning everybody was to be in the field directly after breakfast, to begin the pleasant work of carting and stacking. In the evening, there was to be a supper party in the field, consisting of Collins, his wife, and children; Thomas, the coachman, with his wife and son; the two mowers and their families, and the maids. Nurse was to sit at the top of the table, and the cook at the bottom. When supper was over, they were to have a dance on the lawn, and a fiddler was engaged to come by seven o'clock. As to anything that had to be done in the cottage, such as getting tea, or waiting on Aunt

Fanny, Alice, Mary, and all the rest with one accord declared they would undertake that; and they seemed to consider it would be capital fun. The cook was busy preparing cold pies, and all manner of substantial fare; large cakes were made, and everything promised well. So did the weather. The sky was clear, and a splendid full moon lighted up the hay-field, when Harry called everybody out, before they went up to bed, to give an opinion as to "what luck for to-morrow?" There could be no doubt about it. It would certainly be fine.

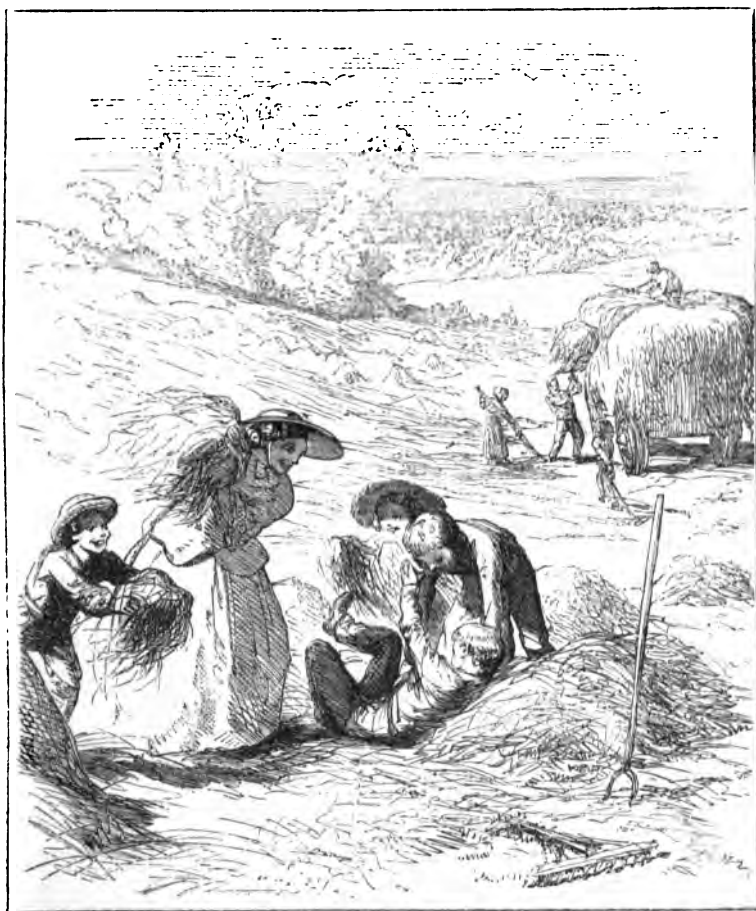
Mary and Kitty were awoke at six o'clock by Alice, who opened their door, exclaiming, "Jump up! it is a lovely morning!" and in five minutes from that time, if there had been any passers-by looking up at the cottage windows, they would have seen a face at every one on the bed-room floor; but there were none, unless some swallow or sparrow chanced to glance at them.

The wagon, hired for the occasion from the neighbouring farm, was in the field by nine o'clock, and was hailed by a shout of welcome from the boys. Then began the work of loading it, every one working hard, some with forks, some with rakes. Collins had already prepared the place where the haystack was to be erected, by placing a

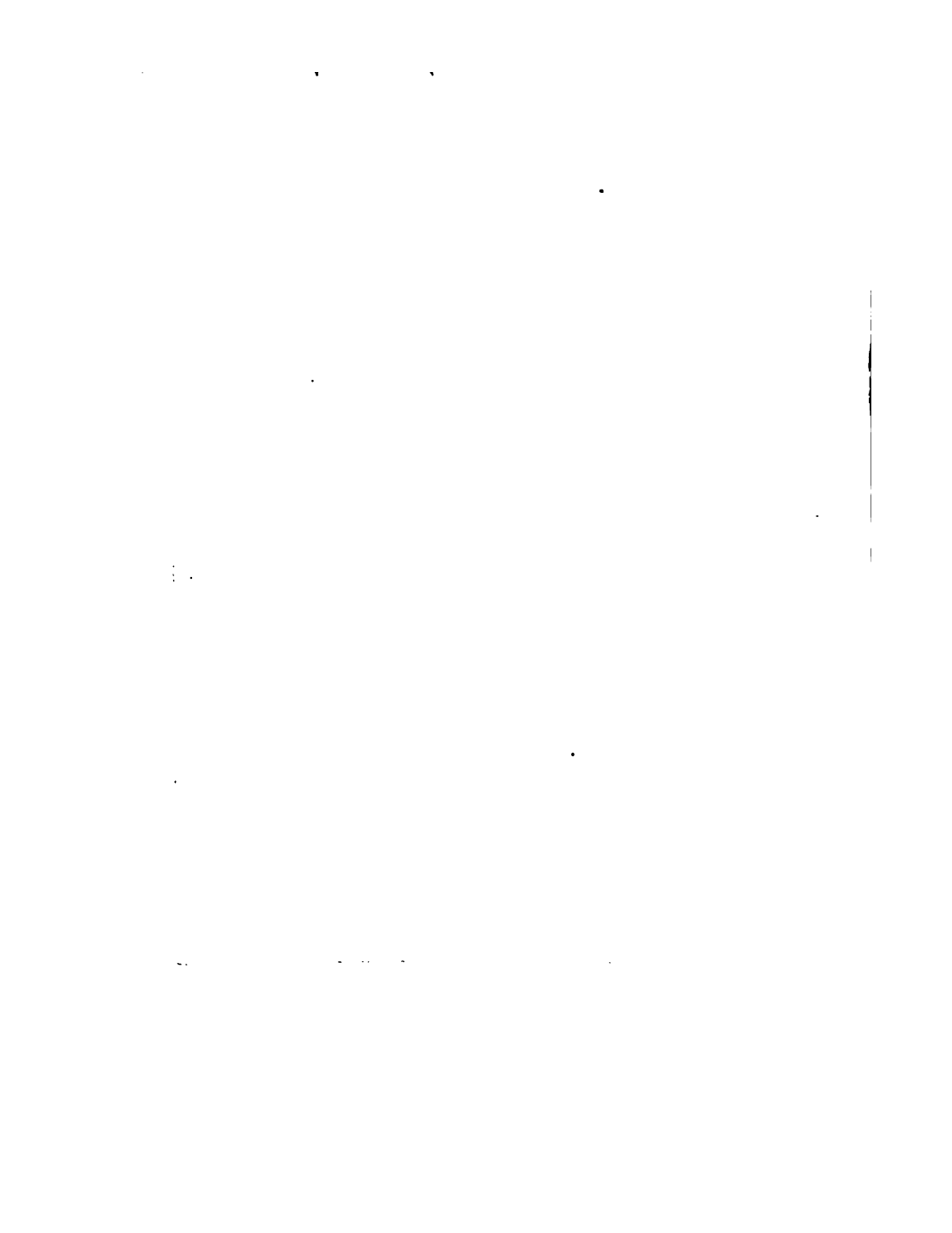
good thick layer of dry boughs on the ground ; and now he was in the wagon, receiving the hay as it was thrown up by the numerous hands employed, and packing it properly in the wagon. Harry and Fred took it by turns to lead the horse, and stop him at the proper place, each, when off duty with the horse, forking up, assisted by Walter and Jack, and by Alice, Mary, Constance, and Janey, when they were not too tired ; but they often felt their arms ache. The little ones had full employment in raking.

The first wagon-load was driven off to the place in the corner of the field that Collins had prepared, with three cheers ; and now Harry and Fred mounted on the top, and forked down the hay, while Collins carefully laid it flat on the boughs, assisted by the whole party, whom he advised and instructed continually ; the rakers also had plenty to do, collecting what was scattered or blown about by the wind. The hay was pronounced to be the finest ever made, and the stack was expected to be much larger than last year.

The stack rose grandly, and as load after load was deposited on it, the forkers had to throw up the hay, instead of throwing it down, and Harry and Fred were enlisted by Collins as his assistants in building it up ; so Walter and



LAST DAY OF HAY-MAKING.



Jack forked it up out of the wagon. By this time, the maids had been called out to help, and came very willingly to enjoy the work; and even nurse and the cook were forced to rake now and then. It must be owned that the juvenile part of the community did not go on so steadily all day as they had begun, but permitted themselves on various occasions the relaxation of burying each other under the hay, flinging it at faces, and suddenly upsetting a neighbour into the midst of the nearest haycock. Jack was particularly apt to indulge in these amusements.

Everybody was very ready to go to dinner when summoned by Aunt Fanny, but quite as ready to start off to the field again when Collins sent in to say that it was two o'clock. By four the last load was on its way to the stack, Collins leading the horse, all the boys on the top of the load, and all the girls walking by the side, carrying green boughs, and marching very merrily to the sound of the boys' continual cheers. Near the stack they found Aunt Fanny, seated on a chair, which Alice had brought there for her, and nurse, the cook, and the maids were summoned to leave the supper-table, about which they were busy, for they must come and see the last load forked up. So many helped that this important ceremony was con-

cluded in a wonderfully short time, and the stack was pronounced to be splendid. There were three cheers, waving of hats, and caps, and green boughs, and, finally, a dance round the haystack, all holding hands; then the wagon was led home; Collins went to dress for supper, and the hay-making was over.

The supper-table was declared to look very well, except that it wanted flowers, which the girls soon supplied in abundance, and then went in, got ready for tea, and kept their word about waiting, and doing everything that was wanted, so that the supper-party in the field went on quite successfully, and sounds of laughter and of songs often came in at the open windows; indeed, so happy were the guests that they had not risen from table when the fiddle was heard at the door. Very little delay, however, took place; for all the boys, led on by Jack, started off to the field, and, joining with the maids in clearing away, completed it in less than five minutes. Away went Fred with a pile of plates; next came Harry with the empty dishes (for all were empty, plentiful as the supper had been); then Jack with a tray of jingling glasses—in short, everything was ready; and the dance began at a quarter-past seven.

And the dance was as pleasant and merry as all the rest had been. At nine o'clock cake and elder-wine were carried round, and, with a kind good-night to all, the party separated, and a good sound sleep ended a very happy day.

CHAPTER VI.

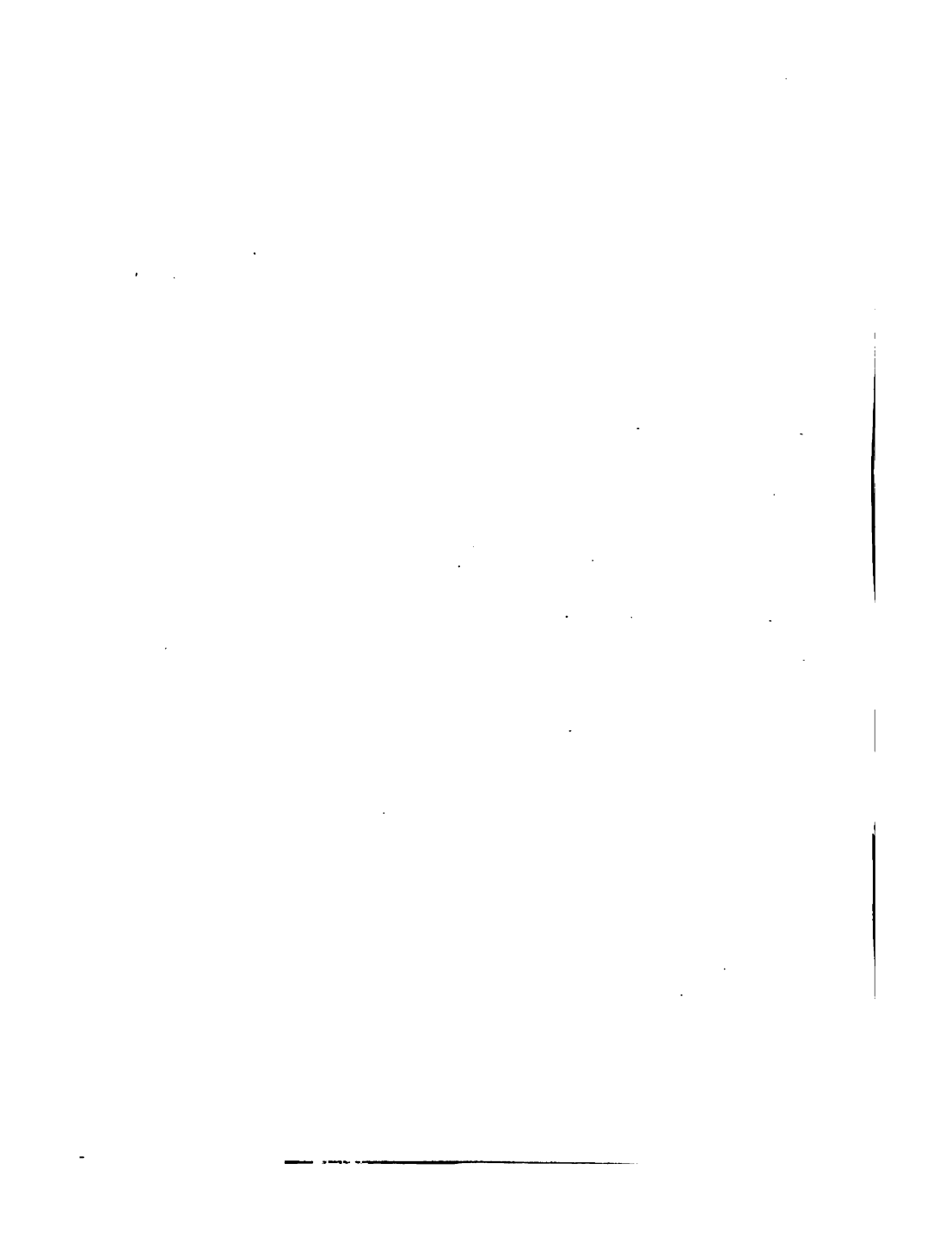
THE BOOK OF SPORTS.

THREE happy weeks had passed ; every day had brought its pleasures ; the weather had generally been fine, and the few rainy days that had occurred had been very nearly as happy as the finer ones ; for there was a large empty room in the cottage, in which all manner of games could go on ; in the morning and in the evening they had got up a dance now and then, or sometimes, if they were tired and glad to rest, had set one of the party to read aloud while the rest listened—for there were plenty of books.

One morning came, however, of that doubtful kind which is worst of all, for it seems neither one thing nor another. It had been decided the night before that they should make an excursion far into the forest, and should carry provisions with them, and pic-nic in some beautiful spot ; so it was doubly vexatious that the clouds would spread over the sky and hide the sun, which every now and then shone brilliantly. Once it looked so bright that they decided they would go. Nurse began to get out baskets for the cold fowls and sandwiches, the fruit and



THE WEATHER-WISE SHEPHERD.



cakes, and the other things she meant to pack for them ; the ponies and carriages were ordered, and everybody was rushing up stairs to get ready, when the sky darkened again, and a few large drops of rain fell.

"It will not do," said Alice, sorrowfully, as she stopped on the stairs and looked out. "We must give it up."

Aunt Fanny at the same moment appeared at the drawing-room door, and, with a grave face, said that she hoped they did not mean to venture out; the weather looked too threatening.

The whole party came slowly down, and assembled round her.

"You must find out some amusement in doors," said she, "to occupy the morning. If I have any skill in the clouds, we shall have a fine evening; and I consulted Farmer Trueman's shepherd, whom I met in the lane as I came here, driving his sheep to pasture, and he said the same; so did Sally, the milkmaid. If we are all right, you can go into the woods and play games in the evening, without going to any great distance."

"I'll tell you what," said Mary, "suppose we think over all the games we have invented since we came, and fix on one for the evening."

"So we will," said Harry. "We always waste such a time in debating, and choosing, and deciding what we shall do."

"I like owl game best," cried little Kitty.

"Frog was a thousand times more fun," said Jack.

"Oh but," cried Fred, "we invented much better games than those. Don't you recollect bogies and fairies, and spreading enchantment, and giant game with the hoops?"

"No, no! the hoops were in turnpike game," cried two or three at once.

"Now listen to me; do pray be quiet, George," said Harry. "Let Alice get paper, pen, and ink, and write down all the games we have invented. She can remember, I dare say; or, at any rate, Mary and I, Constance and Fred, will help, and all you little ones can listen, and correct, and remind."

"It's an excellent plan," said Fred.

Alice was accordingly seated at a table without loss of time; and, after some hours of noisy debate, in which there were all sorts of different opinions given and taken, the following games were written down, and headed:—

BOOK OF SPORTS AND OUT-OF-DOOR GAMES.*

I.

Each child finds a home, and in the middle is a stick or some mark which they have to run and touch. Whoever touches it first is giant. Whilst giant hides his eyes, they go and pick up a ball, which is his property. They take it to their home, and then run away again ; he runs to fetch it, and they try to catch him before he returns to the mark. Whoever catches him is giant. If he returns to the mark without the ball, he pays a forfeit.

II.

One child is frog ; he jumps (frogs) after the others, until he catches them all. He then sets them puzzling tasks. Each as he performs his task is set free, and the last one becomes frog.

III.

There are two rows of large stones, arranged at equal distances round the play-ground ; these are called turnpikes, and each has a keeper. The other children take hoops (horses), and try to roll them between the two stones, without touching either. If the rider succeeds, the keeper pays him a stone ; if not, the rider pays the keeper one. That child wins who goes through all the turnpikes without touching.

IV.

There are three witches, who decide on an animal. The other children come up and guess what animal it is. If the right one is guessed, the witches, without saying who guessed it, start off running,

* Some of these games are very much alike, but I leave the book exactly as the children wrote it.

which sets all the rest scampering, for they do not know who was the right one. If the one who guessed is caught before they get home, he takes the witch's place.

V.

One person is fisherman, who is placed on a high place, with a long rod or stick ; the rest call themselves after fishes ; he must not know their names. He then tries to touch one, and guesses the name. If he succeeds, the fish is fisherman ; if not, the fish is free.

VI.

One child represents a bad fairy. The rest choose partners and a general home. Then the fairy runs after them, and when half the company are caught, the fairy gives all the prisoners flower names. The rest come forward, and each in turn asks for one of the flowers. If he guesses his partner, they are free, till all are free. If two partners are caught, they pay a forfeit, and are free.

VII.

One child is a King of the Bogies, another a Queen of the Fairies. Then divide the rest into two parties ; one is under the king, the other under the queen, and each party finds a home. The fairies then spread enchantment—that is, whoever touches a certain place is caught. The fairies hide their prisoners, and the bogies try to find them. When a bogey is freed, he is allowed to pass safe back.

VIII.

One half of the company are owls, the other half are children. The children form themselves into a ring and one owl, called chief owl, tries to get into it. When he has done so, he carries off one child as his prisoner. When half the children are prisoners, the owls form a ring, and the remaining children try to get into it ; when they

have done so, they take one of their prisoners back. So they go on till they have got them all back.

IX.

A bank is chosen by the whole community, of which there is a keeper. This keeper is a stupid man. One child is a miser, who puts his money (stones) into the bank. The children give themselves fictitious names, and ask the keeper for the miser's money. He is stupid enough to give it them. When the miser comes, he runs after both keeper and children. Whoever is caught is miser.

X.

Game for a large Party.

One child personates Robin Hood. Some more children arrange themselves under him as archers, with bows and arrows (if possible). Then a game is carried on; they capture travellers (other children), and do other things.

XI.

Game which can be played by a large or small Party.

One child acts guide; the rest take hoops, which they call horses. The guide has his horse. He then guides them over the mountain, as they call the field or playground. Many adventures happen, and the guide tells them mountain stories.

XII.

Take a field or wood for your playground; fix your house under a bush or tree. Divide your party into men, women, and children. One is Queen of the Gipsies. They go out to pick up sticks; some light fires, some get provisions, some go about telling fortunes, some pretend to cook, &c. &c.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAME OF ROBIN HOOD.

By the time Alice had written as far as this, nurse came to say they must get ready for dinner. There was no more time for writing, though there seemed no end to the games they might have remembered had they gone on; and, to their surprise, they found that it was a bright, fine day; the clouds were sailing away in large white masses over a deep blue sky, and they had been so busy they had forgot to look at the weather. It was evident that Aunt Fanny was right, and that they might go out and enjoy the woods in the evening.

All dinner the discussion went on as to what game they should choose, and at last it was decided by show of hands that Robin Hood was the favourite.

"We have bows and arrows," said Fred, "and can act it in style."

"And let us put on everything green that we can muster," said Jack.

"We must pretend we are in green," said Alice. "You have a green jacket, you know, Jack; but I don't think

any of the others have, and none of us have green frocks—at least, none that we could play in. But we will get out the bows and arrows, and set up the target, and Robin Hood can begin by making his men practise at the mark.”

“Fred shall be Robin Hood first,” said Harry.

“And Alice shall be Maid Marian,” said Mary.

“Yes, and all the rest must be men. Janey shall be Friar Tuck, because she’s fattest,” said Jack.

“And Constance Allan-a-Dale, because she sings best,” said George.

“No; I want to be Allan-a-Dale,” said Jack. “I know what I can put on to look well.”

“Very well; then it is fixed that we shall play at Robin Hood,” said Alice—“that Fred is to be Robin Hood first, and I Maid Marian, and Janey Friar Tuck,—I think you are very impertinent, Master Jack, though,—and that you are Allan-a-Dale. If you do not keep your word, and come properly dressed, you shall pay a forfeit.”

Jack looked very important, and nodded his head, as much as to say he had no doubt about his appearance.

They now dispersed to prepare, appointing to meet at the trysting-tree, which was to be a certain old oak in a grassy alley at the foot of a little hill, at four o’clock.

Punctually to her time, Maid Marian appeared on the ground, and she had been better than her word. By Aunt Fanny's kind help, she had been dressed out very prettily. She had a green train. Bows of green ribbon fastened up her dress, and her hat was ornamented with flowers. The few of the "merry men" who had already collected greeted her with a shout of welcome and approbation, and as one after another appeared, the applause was continued.

Jack presently marched gracefully up, with bow in hand, and placing himself in an attitude, shot at the target. He wore his green suit, with a scarf tastefully tied over one shoulder. He had mounted a quiver, to which he had tied a rounded stick, so as to represent a harp, and this was slung behind him. Altogether his costume was highly picturesque, and cries of "Allan-a-Dale for ever!" "Bravo, comrade!" filled the air. Unfortunately, his arrow did not strike the target, but glanced aside in rather an awkward manner; but he stepped back with such an air that he had all the appearance of success, and no one took any notice of his failure.

Robin Hood was distinguished by a green sash and a green velvet cap, which Aunt Fanny had hastily constructed out of an old bonnet, and looked very well. He threw him-



THE TRYSTING TREE.



self down at the foot of the oak tree to judge of the marksmen, and had soon mustered his band. Most of them had contrived to dress up a little—some in ribbons, others with green boughs; one or two of the boys had turned their jackets inside out.

After each had tried his skill at the target, and Robin Hood had surpassed them all by shooting his arrow into the bull's-eye, and receiving three rounds of applause, he harangued his men as follows:—

“Silence, my friends! I have important information to give you. I have received intelligence, by means not now necessary to detail, that a party of hired ruffians belonging to the Baron of Beaulieu, carrying the spoils of a whole village”—(cries of “Shame!”)—“are about to pass the eastern outskirts of the forest. The Miller and Little John, with a strong party, must intercept them, recover the booty, and bring it here. It shall be the task of Maid Marian to restore the property to the despairing villagers.” (Shouts of “Bravo! Our gallant leader for ever!”)

“Silence, once more!” continued Robin Hood. “On the western frontier of our domains, a number of lazy monks are even now ambling along on their mules. Let Friar Tuck, with another party—it need only be a small

one—sally forth to deal with his brethren, and to escort them hither. They shall deposit a good round ransom, and then proceed on their way with all convenient speed.” (Laughter, and cries of “The Friar for ever !”)

“ Our next care,” continued the gallant leader, “ must be to provide the feast for the night’s repast. Allan-a-Dale, for you I have reserved the pleasing duty of following me to the chase. See that your bowstring is in order, and that your hand and eye are more steady and skilful than on the occasion which I blushed to witness recently, and we will not return without a fat buck. Prepare, therefore, beauteous Maid Marian, to cook our venison, and I invite one and all to our hospitable board this night. Can there be one more worthy our state and dignity ? The fresh turf for our tablecloth, the green boughs overhead for our canopy, and the starry arch of heaven for our ceiling !”

Rapturous shouts greeted the conclusion of this oration, and every one repaired to his post. Harry and Walter, as the Miller and Little John, accompanied by little Kitty, who was to be the “ strong party,” set off in one direction, while Constance and George, as the “ hired ruffians,” ran behind the trees to be ready to be attacked, and to make



THE KING'S FAT DEER.



a desperate resistance. Janey, as the Friar, with Margaret, as the "small party," sallied forth in the opposite direction, and Mary undertook to be the "lazy monks." Alice remained on the spot, and began collecting brush-wood to make the fire, holding herself in readiness to receive each party as one after the other should return.

All this arranged, Robin Hood and Allan-a-Dale seized their bows, filled their quivers, and prepared to start; and it so happened that, at that very instant, a group of the king's fat deer, which had been observed hovering near for some time, bounded off at full speed. Without a moment's delay, the two outlaws rushed after them, and were soon out of sight among the thick underwood and massive branches of the trees.

CHAPTER VIII.

ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD AND ALLAN-A-DALE.

A WILD chase over stock and stone after the deer which bounded before them soon carried the two boys far from the trysting-tree. The deer, too familiarised to the sight of man to be very shy, stopped every here and there, made circuits, and dashed back again, and even began to browse contentedly now and then, so that they lured on their pursuers simply because they were not in the least afraid of them ; but after about a quarter of an hour's good hard run, Fred and Jack stopped, having entirely lost sight of their game, and threw themselves panting on the grass. As soon as they had recovered breath enough to speak, they mutually agreed that they had gone far enough, and would go back again. "Stop a minute, though," said Jack, who had begun roaming about and poking into nooks and crevices, and then, seating himself on the ground, took out his knife and began cutting a fallen bough.

"I cannot think what you are about!" said Fred.

"You would not have us go disgracefully back without the venison," replied Jack, continuing to cut and

shape the bough. "If this capital fat buck will not satisfy them, I don't know what will!"

"As he spoke he threw the bough he had prepared over his shoulder. It was well shaped, and being thickly clothed with the grayish-brown leaves of last autumn, really looked a little like a dead deer.

"It is capital!" cried Fred, "but let me carry it, you have quite enough to do with your harp, clambering through the brambles and branches."

This transfer being made, they set themselves in motion.

"Which is the way?" asked Fred.

"Let me see," said Jack. "That must be the path, I think."

They looked about them, and then looked at one another. Awakening as from a dream, they saw far round them one deep shadow, one thick and continuous roof of boughs, and thousands of hoary tree trunks. There was nothing to mark which way to go, nor which way they had come.

"We cannot be very far from home at all events," said Fred, "so let us take the most likely path, and get on as fast as we can."

After a little debate about which was the most likely path, they chose one and walked sturdily on, Fred shouldering the fat buck. Every here and there they passed long glades or ravines, and looked down them, expecting to see at the end Maid Marian preparing for their venison; but all was silence and solitude. Then they came to trees larger and finer than any they had seen. Jack thought he remembered climbing up one old beech-tree, remarkable from having a hollow opening in the middle, once when he was a little fellow, but he was not sure; there might be another like it. At last they emerged on a wide open space, where the ground was covered with heath.

"This cannot be the way," said Fred. "Stop, I think I hear some people passing through there. Let us take this path to the left."

As he spoke a herd of wild forest ponies came scampering out of the woods, crossed the heath, and disappeared down a glade.

"We must turn back," said Jack. "I am certain we shall not find the way across this heath. Now, let us see; that path to the left looks very likely."

Down this path to the left, therefore, they turned, and

soon became entangled in the thickest underwood. The "fat buck" had long since been thrown down to rest in its native woods, and Allan-a-Dale's harp and scarf were left sticking on some briar or branch. Still they struggled on.

A flash of light made Fred pause. It was a beam from the setting sun that, suddenly emerging from a bank of clouds, dazzled his eyes; and he started, as he tried to look up, to see a hairy face and a large pair of eyes fixed on him. He felt, for a moment, as if he was among the enchantments of the Black Forest, like the knight in the story of "Undine," which they had been reading the evening before at the cottage; but it was only a stag with its head above a holly-bush, and its antlers among the branches of a great tree above. It dashed away, and the crash of its progress sounded for a long time in his ears.

The two boys sat down completely exhausted.

"We are in a bad scrape, Jack," said Fred. "The sun has set, and we shall soon be in the dark."

"At all events let us get out of this underwood if we can. If we could but find a path once more, we might get home by it. We must get home, you know."

"Of course we must. The only way is to keep straight on in one direction. If we turn back, or go to one side, we may wander about till midnight."

Stoutly, therefore, they did walk on; and at last found to their joy that the underwood grew thinner, and finally ceased; and a wide opening in the trees looked hopeful. To their eyes, used to the darkness in the thickets, it looked almost light too. But again the trees closed over head; the stems stood thickly round; the light waned faster and faster. Suddenly Jack stopped, and picked up something off the ground.

"Here's your bow, Fred," said he, "We have got back to the great beech-tree again that we stopped under before, and where you lost it."

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Fred. "Which way to turn I have no notion in the world."

"I wish we had all been at Jericho before we began that hateful game of Robin Hood," sighed poor Jack. "I am tired to death, and starving with hunger; and I dare say they are all happy and comfortable at tea, never thinking of us."

"That I am sure you don't think. You are only grumbling because you are so miserable. It is very

horrid, really. Stop! listen! I heard some one shouting. They are looking for us, depend upon it. That was Harry's voice, I am certain. Hulloah! We are here! Hulloah!"

Jack jumped up, and shouted with all his might too. Then they listened, but all was silent.

Again there came a sound on the wind, but it was a strange one, not like a human voice; still Fred returned it, so did Jack, but his voice was quavering and unsteady.

Again they listened, almost holding their breath. The sounds came nearer, but now they sounded like hoarse cries and discordant shrieks. Jack trembled, and threw his arms round Fred, declaring they should be murdered.

They were still standing under the large tree, and with one accord they began to climb it. Their fear gave them such strength that they had mounted to the top of the huge trunk, and stationed themselves in the spreading arms, in a wonderfully short space of time.

Nearer and nearer came the strange sounds. There was a crashing among the leaves and branches, and there was a sound as of many feet. Jack had a horrible fear that witches and bogies were true after all. They crouched down among the leaves, and remained quite still.

A VISIT TO THE NEW FOREST.

say, Fred; I see a light among the trees," whisper. "What can it mean?"

He slowly and cautiously turned his head. "Why, moon rising!" he answered. "How late it is! What is that moving under the tree?"

"Oh, I see what it all means," said Jack, finding his gain. "It's a herd of forest pigs all the time. I have thought of that, only they did make such an ordinary set of noises. Look at them routing about moonlight."

"What a number of them, and what a hideous noise they make. I'm so tired, that I do believe I could go to this tree if they would but leave off."

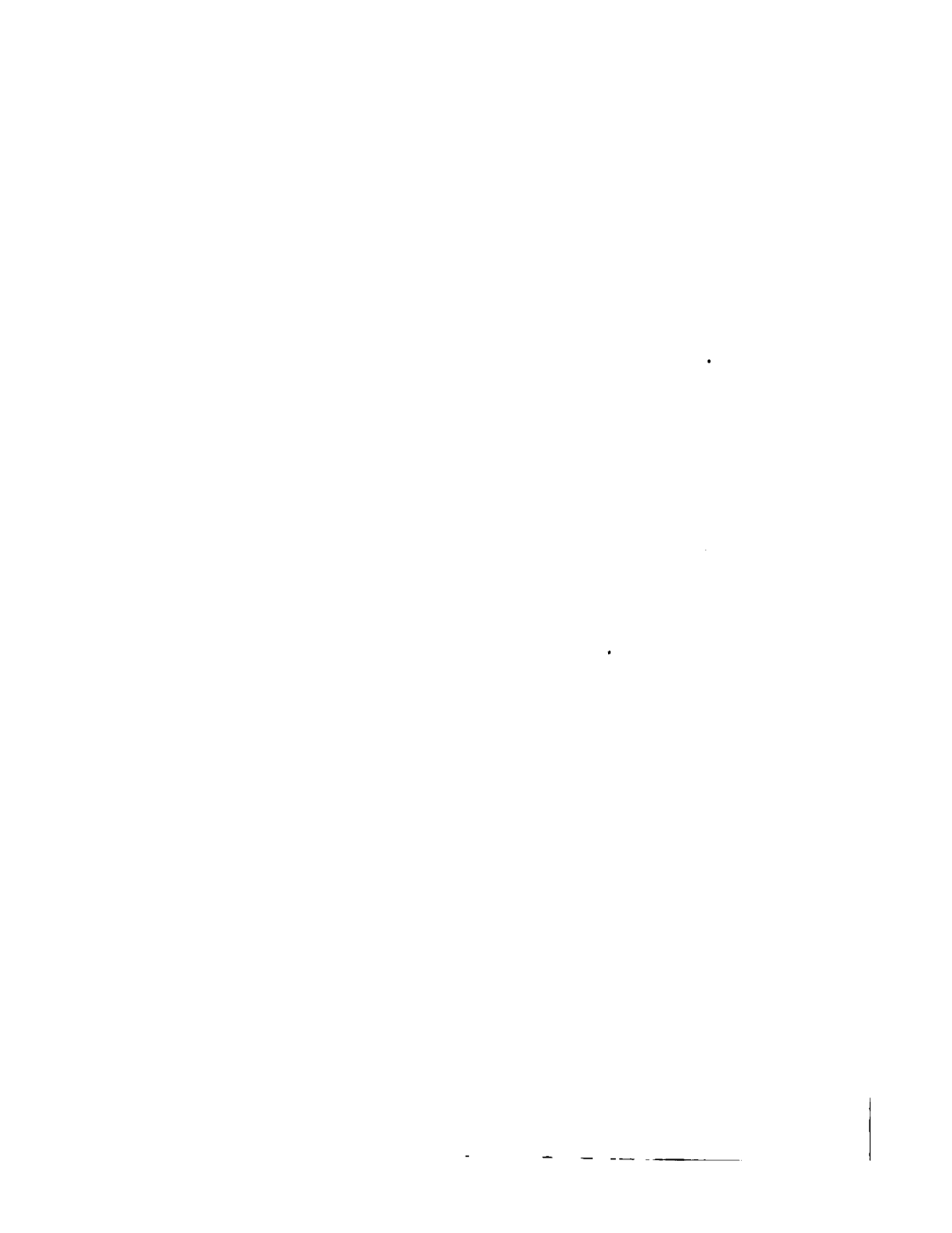
"Could I. I am uncommonly snug here in this branch, only for those pigs. Get along, you ugly!" said Jack; throwing a stick down, for which they cry little.

"He broke off a large branch, and aimed it at one; but the man thus attacked only looked up, and they saw a little eye twinkle in the moonlight."

"Say, Fred, it is very like Harry's voice, is it not?" he highly flattered, I am sure, when he hears that "quite certain" you heard him shout."



THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.



"Yes, if he ever sees us again," said Fred; "but if we stop sitting here in this tree, I don't think there is much chance he will for some time. I vote for clambering down, and trying our chance in the moonlight."

"Very well," answered Jack. "Come on, then."

They were soon on the ground again, and clear of the offending pigs; and now the moon's rays streamed through the trees, and they could see about them almost as well as in the daylight.

"Now let us collect our senses," said Fred. "We went that way, and it led us wrong. Let us take just the opposite now, and take care to go straight on."

They set off. Having walked ten minutes the trees became thinner, and before long ceased altogether; and they found themselves on the borders of a wide grassy space, quite bare and open, which Jack said he never remembered to have seen before. The moonlight made every object visible, and here and there pools of water glittered among the grass. They stood looking before them, and feeling very desponding.

"Look across the open ground to where you see a dark line of trees, Jack," said Fred. "Does it not seem to

you that there is a roof of a cottage, or farm-house, just there? I even fancy I see a light in the window."

"I see it quite plain," said Jack. "What a good thing! We must get there as fast as we can, knock at the door, and ask for a night's lodging. As to getting home to night, I give it up."

"I don't. We must ask them to put us in the way, and then go on there as fast as possible. They will be in a fright about us, and fancy all sorts of things, if we don't."

"Well," replied Jack, "if we can get a piece of bread and cheese, or something; but I'm afraid that is not a light in a window, but only the moon glancing on the glass; and the people will all be in bed."

"Anyhow let us get on," said Fred.

They began to walk across the grass, keeping the welcome roof, with its glancing window beneath it, in view, and steering their course straight towards it; but they had not advanced above a hundred yards when the ground began to feel alarmingly soft beneath their feet. Still they could not bear to stop, but hoping this was only a marshy spot, and that they should soon find firm footing again, they continued on their way, till suddenly Fred sank above his ankles, and Jack—who looked at nothing

but the roof opposite to his eyes—passing him, sank to his knees. At the same moment a thick cloud obscured the moon, and the whole scene became shrouded in darkness. Jack's heart failed him utterly, and he cried out to Fred to save him, for he was sinking deeper and deeper.

“Keep up your courage, or it's all over with us,” said Fred in a low, but firm, voice. “Stretch out your hand and try to catch mine. There now! We must face about and try to get on firm ground again. We must fight for it, Jack. It won't do to give up.”

Hand in hand the two boys floundered back towards the spot they had quitted; pulling their feet out of the holes, into which they continually sank, with great difficulty, and often losing their shoes, which they had to stop and pick up. At every step, however, the ground became firmer, and just as Fred said so in an encouraging voice, they both fell flat on their faces over the large trunk of a fallen tree.

Fred was up again in a moment, but poor Jack lay motionless, and any one might have believed he was dead, only that he soon began to bemoan himself in a lamentable voice.

"I wish Robin Hood and all his men had been at Jericho, as I said before, and that all the deer in the forest had been at the bottom of the sea, before we ran after them. I believe that we shall die in this miserable place. I'm tired to death, and I hurt my leg horribly when we fell, and my shoes are full of mud, and I'm starving with hunger, and—"

Fred could not help laughing; though he was in a sufficiently wretched plight himself.

"Come, Jack!" he cried; "get up. At all events, we have got out of that bog. We were really in a bad state there. Look up, I say. The moon has come out again, and there are plenty of fallen trees and felled trunks hereabouts. Let us lie down and rest on one of them. As for me, I cannot see why we might not stretch ourselves out, and sleep here well enough."

Jack rose slowly up and looked about him, and then, as if the idea of rest was quite irresistible, sank down on a large block of wood and, without another word, shut his eyes and was asleep in a minute; and Fred, after ejaculating "Well done! you have lost no time, I'm sure!" followed his example.

How long he had slept Fred did not know, when

something wet and cold touching his face made him start up. He rubbed his eyes, and for a moment could not imagine where he was, nor what had happened to him. A strange panting close to his ear made him start again, and open his eyes wide, when by the moonlight, which still streamed brightly, he saw the honest face of a large dog who stood close by, with his red tongue hanging out of his mouth, and wagging his tail in a friendly manner. It was evident that the wet cold thing which had awoken Fred was his tongue.

"Why, who are you?" said Fred, patting his new acquaintance. "At all events, you seem very good-natured; but I am very cold and stiff, I know that; and there is Jack still fast asleep."

Fred sat up; his friend, the dog, still keeping at his side, and began to think what course to pursue. The dog evidently belonged to some house, for he had a collar on, and seemed gentle and tame; perhaps there was a house very near.

While these thoughts passed through Fred's mind, he heard the sound of a bell not far off. At this he began to shake Jack, who, after various groans and grunts, and exclamations that "it was not near breakfast time yet,

and he would not get up," opened his eyes, and asked "what was the matter?"

"I hear a bell. Listen, and you will hear it too."

Jack raised himself, but soon sank down again, saying it was nothing but a cow-bell, and that most likely a herd of forest cows was near, and they only heard a bell that was tied round some of their necks.

"No matter, Jack," said Fred. "You must be as cold as I am, and perhaps the cows may belong to some farm near; and this dog—here, rouse up, and look at him—is, I dare say, near his home. You must wake up, and we will start off in the direction of the bell."

Very unwillingly, and yawning and stretching several times before he would move, Jack did at last begin to walk after Fred; and the dog, who continued near them, trotted on before. Fred resolved to follow this dog, as he evidently went in the direction of the sound of the bell, which went on without ceasing. If only they had not been so tired, the two boys would have enjoyed their walk, it was so beautiful under the trees. Once they came into the midst of a rabbit warren, and if they could have laughed at anything, would have laughed at the gambols the rabbits were making, and at the sudden way



GAMBOLS BY MOONLIGHT.

in which they popped into their holes at the alarm of approaching feet; but they thought of nothing except listening to the cow-bell, and straining their eyes in hopes that some human habitation might be near.

"Don't you think it is growing lighter?" said Jack, as they went on.

"I am sure it is. I have noticed it for some time, and seen the red light in the sky. It is near sunrise."

"Only think that we have been out all night," said Jack, almost crying. Indeed—as he stumbled after Fred, often falling a good distance behind, and then running to make up his lost way—he did cry, but he wiped his eyes with his jacket-sleeve as quickly as he could, when Fred turned round and beckoned to him.

"I see the roof of a cottage now, I am sure. There is no mistake this time," was Fred's joyful announcement.

Jack quickened his pace. They soon emerged from the trees on a meadow where four or five cows were feeding, the welcome bell tinkling as they moved; and a small farm-house with thatched roof, a few fields, a stack-yard, and orchard and garden, lay before them.

Jack was for going to the door instantly and knocking up the inhabitants, but Fred stopped him.

"It is so very early still," he said. "In another **hour** they will be waking up. Meanwhile here is a **shed** with plenty of dry straw in it, and our dog has laid **himself** down on it. Let us lie down there too. I am **sure** I would rather lie down here at once than go through **all** the worry and delay of knocking up the people."

"You are right. So would I. We should have to stand waiting and talking for half an hour perhaps. It's well thought of. I shall creep up into this cart; it looks delicious."

"No—no—don't! The straw in the corner would be much the best. You have no business in the cart," cried Fred.

But it was vain to expostulate. Jack had already laid himself at full length on the hay at the bottom of a cart which stood under the shed, packed with baskets and hampers, its shafts propped up on a rail; had covered himself with a tarpaulin, and was apparently asleep. At any rate he would return no answer to Fred's repeated appeals, and while Fred was making a desperate resolution to get up and pull him out by the feet, he himself, overcome by fatigue, dropped down on the straw, and fell fast asleep in a moment.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PURSUIT.

WHILE these adventures befel the unfortunate Robin Hood and Allan-a-Dale, it will be believed that their disappearance had caused much anxiety at Ringwood Cottage.

For a good while the game went on with great spirit. Constance and George, who were a party of "hired ruffians" of the Baron of Beaulieu, were assaulted so suddenly, and with such fury, by Harry and Walter, or, as we ought to call them, the Miller and Little John, assisted by little Kitty, as the "strong party," that they were obliged to surrender at discretion; and being brought to the trysting tree, laid the spoils of the village at the feet of Maid Marian. The spoils, consisting of large branches of wild honeysuckle, she placed in a hollow tree until she could restore them to the villagers. The ruffians, after being disarmed, were ordered to imprisonment in a neighbouring cave, until they could be sent beyond seas, where they could plague unhappy England no more. The adventures of Friar Tuck and the monks, and all the others ordered by Robin Hood, were completed equally satisfac-

torily, and as that leader did not yet return to his band, fresh exploits were performed. George, mounted on his pony, announced himself to be a monk on an ambling mule, and riding along a glade, he joined Mary and Constance as a party of travellers. While in conversation, they were attacked by Friar Tuck and the Miller. The monk's mule started, turned suddenly round, and threw his master. In this emergency, it may be supposed that the unfortunate churchman was quite unable to defend himself, and that he was captured and robbed. Friar Tuck then started in pursuit of the travellers, who had taken to flight. Mary, being a London merchant, was quite unable to escape. She was quickly overtaken, bound, and seated beside the monk; but Constance, who was a Knight Templar, mounted on a noble charger, led them a long chase under the trees, and finally escaped, and reaching the trysting tree, put herself under the protection of Maid Marian, who accorded it, but laid a heavy fine in the shape of a forfeit on Friar Tuck and the Miller for their laggard awkwardness. Harry, who now personated Little John, remained for some time near Alice to regulate the different parties as they went out and came in; but growing tired of inactivity, he again sallied forth in search of ad-

ventures, and was speedily attacked by Kitty and Margaret, who were king's pursuivants. After a severe combat, in which he wounded both his adversaries, he returned to Maid Marian, carrying one on each shoulder, and gave orders that every attention should be paid to them, their wounds healed, and they themselves sent back safe to the king, to show him how freebooters treated their enemies.

Having finished this adventure, and sat down to rest, and grown cool after the romp and laughter it had occasioned, Harry began to look round.

"What has become of Fred and Jack?" said he. "It is very stupid of them to keep away such a time. They will spoil the game."

"Let us call them in," said Walter.

Shouts of "Come back, Fred!" "What are you about, Jack?" "Hulloah! Robin Hood! we want you to come!" "Allan-a-Dale, where are you?" and all manner of different appeals to the absentees began, but all in vain.

"I wish we had a bugle-horn," said George.

"You could not sound it if you had," said Harry.

"Have not you got a whistle at the end of your whip, Harry?" asked little Kitty.

"So I have, brave pursuivant!" replied Harry. "Well

thought of. I shall climb this tree, and sound this whistle, or rather bugle, with all my might, to summon our missing commander, and whoever says it's a whistle, and not a bugle-horn, shall pay a forfeit."

Harry climbed the tree accordingly, sounding his horn at various points in the ascent, and looking out in every direction as he did so. At last he reached the very top, seated himself, and blew a long continuous blast, then looked this way and that, down path and glade, and over thicket and copse, but all in vain. The tree was a very high one; it overtopped most of those near, and commanded a wide expanse of view; but he could see nothing of Fred and Jack.

"Don't you see them?" cried several voices below.

"It's my belief they have lost themselves in the forest," he shouted back in return. Then he blew another blast, gave a loud shout, and looked round again.

It was vain to look, to shout, or to blow his horn. Fred and Jack, as we know, had incautiously run at first to so great a distance that they were completely out of sight and hearing, and when they began to try to return, they had, unluckily for them, taken exactly the opposite path to the right one. They had, indeed, nothing to guide

them but chance; for, surrounded as they were by trees without end or outlet, they could not possibly know which direction to take, having once lost their idea as to the way they came.

Being tired of sitting at the top of the tree, Harry now slowly came down again, and joined the group at its base. All the ten left were now collected together.

"I do not wonder at Fred," said Harry, "because he's not used to the forest, and does not know how easily one may lose oneself in it; but Jack ought to have known better."

"Jack is always heedless," said Walter. "He never thinks what he is about."

"But you do not really think they have lost themselves?" said Mary, beginning to feel very anxious about Fred.

Little Kitty sank down on the grass, and began to cry.

"I do not believe in the least that they have," said Alice. "Depend upon it, they are only playing us a trick. They are very likely hidden in some hollow tree, or in the middle of a thick bush, and laughing at us all this time. Let us change the game to hide and seek, and look for them."

In a moment the woods were filled with shouts and laughter, till every bush and tree round had been beaten and peered into; but at last, one after another, tired with running, climbing, and jumping without success, came back to the trysting tree, and sat down, breathless and exhausted, to rest on its mossy roots. The setting sun sent his golden beams through the leaves, and cast long lines of light on the grass; but the shadows became deeper and broader, and it was evident that darkness would soon prevail.

"If Fred and Jack should be benighted!" This was the idea that pressed on Mary's mind. Alice did not know how to comfort her, nor how to prevent poor Kitty from crying again.

Harry suddenly started up. "Come on!" he cried. "We four boys will get out the ponies, and ride about all the paths near. We must be able to make them hear then."

He dashed off homewards as he spoke, followed by the whole party, and in ten minutes he, Walter, George, and Edward, were riding down a glade of the forest. They soon separated into two parties, appointing a place of meeting, and each looking well about, and calling, shouting, and whistling as they went, scoured every path on the way, till



THE UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH.

night began to close in around them ; and when they met at the appointed place for the second time, they were unwillingly obliged to confess to one another that they must give it up and go home.

Slowly and silently they paced along, trusting more to their ponies to take them right than to their own guidance, for the sky was cloudy, the stars were obscured, and the moon had not yet risen.

A bright light shone from the drawing-room window, and at the sound of their approach, every inhabitant of the cottage had assembled at the door to receive them, for no one doubted that the riders would succeed. Alice had taken care to have tea ready, with plenty of bread and butter, eggs, strawberries, and cherries ; for, as she said, they must be very hungry after such an adventure. Poor Jack ! how he would have enjoyed the good cheer ! Aunt Fanny waited up beyond her usual hour to welcome them back, to hear all about it, and to see that they put on dry shoes, if required.

There was a sad change as the boys slowly stopped and dismounted. It was not necessary to ask if they had found their two companions ; it was quite enough to look at their disappointed faces, and see how tired they were.

Jacob led the ponies to the stable, and they went into the drawing-room, and sank into their chairs, silent and gloomy, without noticing the brightness or thinking at all of Alice's preparations.

Little Kitty had thrown herself into Mary's lap, and was in a passion of tears. All the stories of robbers, wild beasts, and witches she had ever heard, seemed to rise at once into her memory, and she believed she should never see her dear brother Fred again. Edward also pressed to Mary's side, looking very grave, and she turned her anxious eyes first on Alice, then on Aunt Fanny, who both looked anxiously back. Walter was very uneasy about Jack, though he did not choose to show it; and Janey's eyes were full of tears: Harry was both vexed and troubled.

Aunt Fanny was the first to speak. "You must remember, my dears," she said, "though this is a very uncomfortable thing, and though we must feel a little uneasy that the two boys should be out so late in the dark, yet there is no real danger to be feared for them. It is not as if we lived in those old times that you have been acting. We have no robbers in the forest now; there is not even a wild boar to attack any one"—Kitty stopped crying and

looked up—"and even if they should not find their way home till morning——"

"You do not really think they will be out all night?" asked Mary.

"I hope not; but it is possible. If they have got among the thick trees of Boldre Wood, for instance, they may wander about a long time without finding an outlet. But what then? They are both strong, and Fred is old enough to know how to manage somehow, and is a boy of good courage. I have observed that. Then my poor Jack, who is always getting into scrapes, has plenty of spirit, and though he may despond and complain, he gets through somehow always. You see that though I am uncomfortable about him, I am not really anxious. Why, they may sleep in a tree, or find some sheltered nook where there are piles of faggots that might make a capital bed. It is fortunately a fine night, and the moon has risen now."

"I dare say it's capital fun for them, after all," said Walter.

"It would be much better fun if they would but come in, though," said Harry.

"I quite agree to that," replied Aunt Fanny, "and I

hope they will. But, besides that they really might sleep, as I have said, without difficulty or much hardship, they may find a cottage or farm-house, and get a night's lodging."

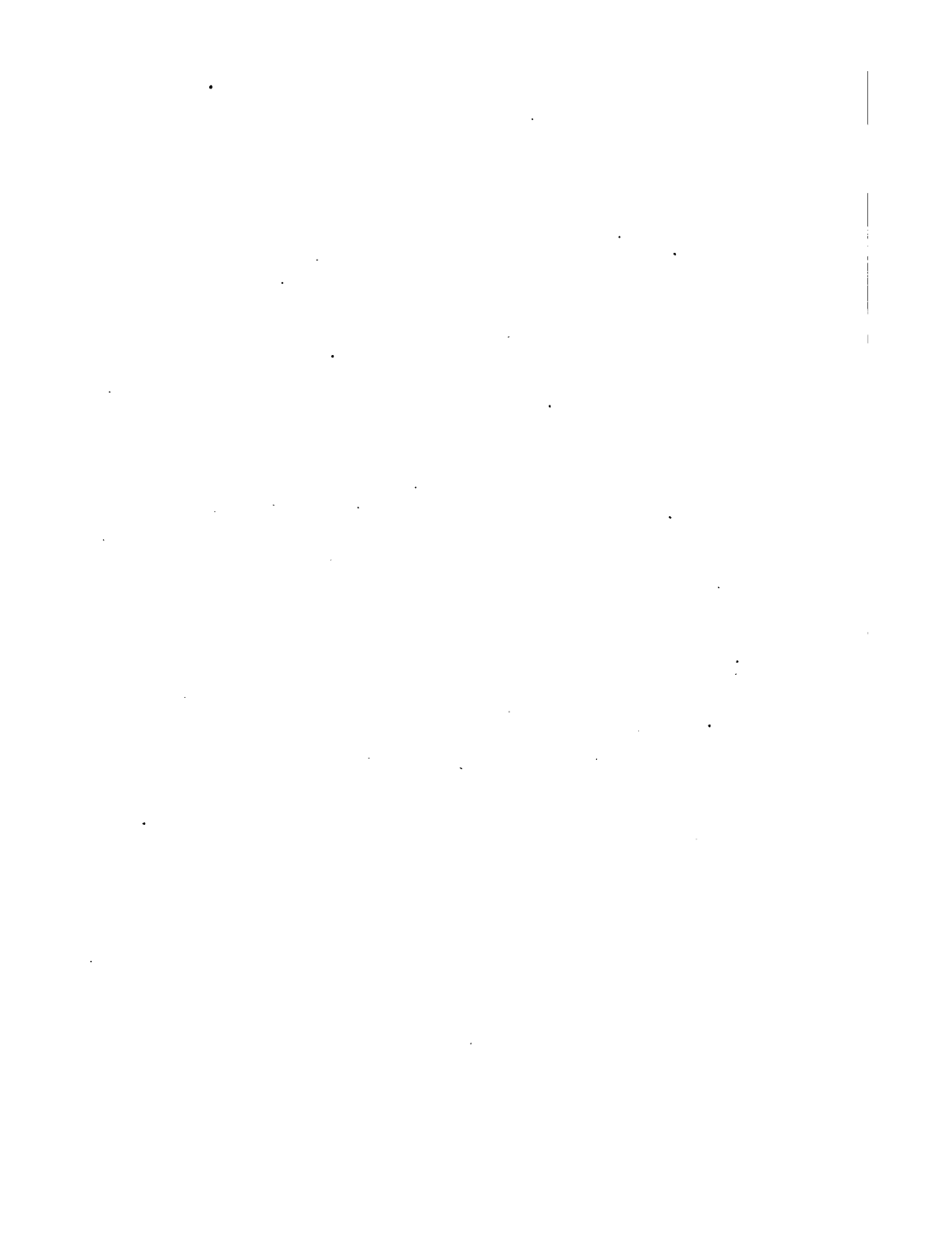
" Oh, if they do, I shall think them very wrong not to manage to ask the way, or get a guide, so as to come back, and prevent our feeling anxious," said Alice.

" Not at all," replied Aunt Fanny. " It would be very difficult to reach this cottage in the dark from many of the places in the forest, even with a guide ; and besides that they may not be able to find any guide, they may be excessively tired and exhausted. Take my advice : sit down and take a good supper, and then go to bed, well assured that we shall see Fred and Jack safe and well to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, I will order lights to be burned in the windows all night, and Jacob shall sit up late, and shall walk round with his lantern presently, when he has finished in the stable."

Comforted by these words, the young party took their seats, and found out, as soon as they began, that they were very hungry ; and then, when hunger was satisfied, that they were very sleepy. Jacob came back from his first round unsuccessful ; but as he put his head in at the door to say so, he asked if any of the young gentlemen or ladies



LISTENING TO THE NIGHTINGALE.



would like to come out to hear the nightingales, which, he said, were "a-singing beautiful like." Aunt Fanny objected to their going out again. Harry and Walter declared they were too tired; but little Edward, who had never heard a nightingale in his life, said he should like to go with Jacob, if he might; and George, who was his inseparable friend, said he should too. So they sallied forth under charge of Jacob, who lifted them up, and seated them among the bushy underwood at the foot of a beech-tree, where a nightingale had perched, and was sending forth its clear, ringing notes. So quietly did Jacob place them, that they did not frighten away the pretty bird, but were able to watch it as it raised its head, and with open beak poured out its varied song. They could even see its little throat quiver when the moonlight fell on it. Edward could not help saying, after one especially beautiful trill, that he wished Mary had come; and at the sound of his voice, the nightingale flew away. But it was time the two little boys were in bed; so it was all for the best.

CHAPTER X.

SEQUEL TO THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD AND
ALLAN-A-DALE.

WE left these two heroes enjoying repose after their wanderings—Fred stretched in a quiet corner of a shed among some dry straw, where he was as warm and comfortable as if he had been on a down bed, and Jack on some sweet soft hay in the cart, well covered over with a tarpaulin. Whatever anxiety Fred might have felt about him before going to sleep he forgot, together with all the other cares of the world, and slept as soundly and quietly as ever tired mortal did, hour after hour.

Jack was awaked after an interval, in which he had been so completely oblivious of all things, that whether it had lasted hours or minutes he was utterly unable to guess; but this he knew, that his present feelings were anything but comfortable. He was in the dark, and very hot and stifled, and his head ached dreadfully. A violent thump on it completely roused him, and he became conscious that it was the second thump he had had, and that he had been awoke out of his sleep by the first. For fear the



PATTY'S ALARM.

third should actually break his skull, he struggled to move, and raise himself out of the place he was in, and a vague recollection that he went to sleep in a cart, and a suspicion that this cart was now in motion, passed through his brain.

“ Oh ! oh ! ah ! ” shrieked a shrill voice above him.

“ What’s the matter ? Be quiet, will you ? Have you lost your wits ? ” growled a hoarse one, also above him.

“ Some one has got hold of my foot. Oh ! oh ! ” shrieked the first voice again. “ Oh, mercy upon me ! ”

The third thump here came upon Jack’s unlucky head, and he made a desperate struggle, upon which one loud continued scream commenced above, and a dog began to bark furiously close by.

“ If you don’t hold your tongue, Patty, ” growled the other voice, “ you’ll frighten Smiler, and we shall be drowned in the river. ”

At this alarming piece of intelligence, Jack made such violent efforts to get up, that he succeeded in freeing himself from the hay, baskets, and hampers that were above him, and in raising his eyes above the tarpaulin.

An angry pair of eyes met his, and a cart-whip was flourished over his head.

"What do you want here? Go along about your business! How did you get into my cart?" roared the man who held it.

A young and plump hand, however, luckily for Jack, grasped the angry man's arm before the whip descended, and a girl's voice, still quavering from the fright she had suffered, said, "Don't, father. It's only a young gentleman—you can see that."

Jack looked round. He was, as he had supposed, in a cart; behind him was a pretty, pleasant-looking country-girl—before him a man in a smock-frock. The cart was standing in the middle of a broad rapid river, the horse was up to its middle in the water, and, quite frightened by all the noise, was standing still, and refused to move, while a dog swam round and round, still barking.

"Get out, sir!" repeated the man. "What right have you in my cart?"

"I will get out, sir, with the greatest pleasure," said poor Jack, rising out of the hay, and shaking himself, "if you will be so good as to drive on. You would not have me get out into the water?"

"What made you get in at all?" growled the man.

"I was lost in the forest last night with a friend of mine," Jack began, "and——"

“ Well now ! I never did ! ” exclaimed the pretty girl.
“ Well to be sure ! Do you belong to Squire Hope’s ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Jack, brightening up. “ We were trying to find our way there, and could not.”

“ Gee, Smiler ! Go on, then. Gee, I say ! ” cried the man, smacking his long whip, and Smiler, giving a few vigorous pulls, brought them safe to the other bank of the river, jolting and jumbling over the stones. Here they stopped again.

“ Don’t you remember, father,” continued Jack’s kind friend, the pretty girl, “ how Mr. Jacob, the coachman, came down to our place this morning, just as we were going to start, and asked us if we had seen two young gentlemen ? ”

“ I never took no notice at all about it,” replied he.

Jack began to search for his cap, which he found with some difficulty in the bottom of the cart. Then he looked round again rather ruefully.

“ I should be very much obliged to you, sir,” he then said, to tell me how I am to get back across this river to the shed. My friend is there, and we must ask our way home.”

“ I never heerd a more queerer thing in my life,”

said the man, with a sort of short, dry laugh. "To think now, that you should be in the bottom of the cart all this time, and we never know it;" and he laughed again.

"But what had the young gentleman better do father?" asked the girl.

"There is no question about that," replied Jack. "I must somehow cross the river again and go first to the shed, which I cannot see, but I suppose it is hidden by the trees."

"It's not loikely you can see it," laughed the man. "I suppose you can't see ten miles off?"

"Ten miles!" exclaimed Jack. "You don't mean that we are ten miles from the place where I went to sleep?"

"Something very near about it," replied the man.

Jack felt very forlorn; indeed, it is not too much to say that he felt very miserable. His head still ached, partly from the thumps it had received when the cart jolted down into the river; partly from his having slept in such a close place. He was sick and exhausted, too, from hunger, having tasted nothing since one o'clock the day before. Patty looked at him, and her kind heart, which had made her exert herself for him before, was moved to pity him now; so, when her father said he had no time to

stand here all day, and that the young gentleman must think as quick as he could what he wanted to do—she came to the rescue again.

“If the young gentleman wants to get to Squire Hope’s,” said she, “he had better come on a mile or two further with us, till we stop at the ‘White Lion.’ That’s close to the Ringwood road, and not more than twelve miles from Squire Hope’s, and he could easily find the way. Any one would direct him.”

Jack said he supposed that was the best way, and he could easily walk twelve miles if he had something to eat first. Smiler was therefore put in motion once more.

A good deal of whispering now began between Patty and her father. She often looked at Jack compassionately, and as they went on her father’s face grew more good-natured, and Jack heard him say, “Well, I don’t mind if I do stop if you loike to ask for it.”

Saying this he drew up at a farm-yard where a number of cows were standing, and where a woman and two little girls, who were passing through on their way to the house, stopped, and nodded to him and to Patty, and wished them good morning.

“And so you’ve got a young gentleman in your

market-cart, this morning, neighbour Trueman," said the woman.

"Yes, Mrs. Gibbs," said Patty, answering for her father, "and if you would kindly give him a draught of your new milk we should thank you heartily, for he hasn't had his breakfast."

"That would I gladly," replied Mrs. Gibbs, "if only I had any; but I milked at four o'clock and sent every drop off to Southampton, except what we've used at breakfast."

She looked at Jack as she spoke; and whether it was that there was something about him she liked, or that his deplorable face at this disappointment made her pity him, a kind thought occurred to her.

"The young gentleman shall have some, though," said she. "Here's Spot will give us a bowlful, I know."

So saying, she went in and brought out her milk-pail, and, seating herself on her little stool, milked Spot for a few minutes; then poured the foaming warm milk into a white bowl, and handed it up to Jack.

Never did anything taste so delicious to him; he felt a new man when he had drained the bowl to the bottom, and returned it to Mrs. Gibbs, thanking her most heartily.



MRS. GIBBS MILKS SPOT.



"You're kindly welcome, I'm sure," said she, "and so good morning to you all, for I must go in-doors."

The cart moved on, Jack thanking Patty quite as warmly as he had thanked Mrs. Gibbs, which was, indeed, quite right, for the thought was hers, and she was thinking of more kind things still. The whispering between her and her father began again, and Jack heard him say, "Well, I don't mind, you may give him some if you loike."

No sooner had Patty received this permission than she took out a sort of market-basket from a corner of the cart, and opening it disclosed a clean cloth in which was wrapped a large home-baked loaf; beside it some fresh cabbage leaves were laid containing a roll of butter. She then took a large clasp knife from her pocket, and began to cut a good thick slice from the loaf, and to butter it.

"If you will accept of some of our bread and butter, sir," she said, "I am sure we shall be very glad. We always take a basketful to grandmother, when we go to Lyndhurst to market, and she would not grudge you some, I am sure."

Jack hardly knew how to thank the kind Patty enough. The milk seemed to have increased his appetite;

his headache and sickness were gone, and he was very hungry. He never forgot that slice of bread and butter which Patty gave him in the cart, and never could believe that there were such good bread and such nice butter anywhere else. To complete his breakfast she opened a hamper full of vegetables, that they were carrying to market, and took out a large bunch of bright red radishes. Then, as the cart had begun to toil slowly up a hill, she jumped out and was going to wash them at a little stream by the roadside. Jack's politeness made him jump out too, and he took them out of her hand and washed them for himself; and then, as he felt thirsty again, he began to drink the clear water, first by taking some up in the hollow of his hand, and then by lying flat down on the grass and dipping his face into it. The refreshment, both of the good bath he gave his head and the cool water he drank, was wonderful; and as he wiped his face Patty quite laughed with pleasure at the sight of his rosy cheeks. They walked up the hill together behind the cart, Jack eating his bread and butter and radishes with a keen appetite.

She cut him another good thick slice after they had climbed into the cart again.



THE WHITE LION.

"It's a shame to take it from your grandmother," said Jack, as he received it from her, "but really I was very hungry, and I am sure I am very much obliged to you."

Patty said her grandmother would give it to him herself if she was here. As she spoke her father pointed along the road to where the sign of the "White Lion" hung swinging in a tall tree, and told Jack that was where he had better get down, and that the first turning to the right would take him into the high road, and then he could find his way home. They soon reached the little inn, and here Jack took leave of the kind Patty and her father.

They drove off. He watched them till they were out of sight, and then began to feel rather forlorn again; but remembering that his first task must be to get home, he looked about to find this turning to the right. Other carts were standing by, the horses having hay and water; ducks and fowls were pecking about; and a village girl was drawing water. He asked the girl, as she passed with her water-can, if he should soon get into the Ringwood road.

"Yes," she said, "he would get into it in five minutes, and he would be at Wood Green in time for the games."

Jack asked, "What games? He was not looking out for any."

"Oh," she replied, "I thought you had come in Farmer Trueman's cart on purpose to go to the club feast; and anyhow, if you go along the Ringwood road, you must pass that way; and I wish I was going myself, only mother would not spare me."

Jack started on his way, resolving to walk steadily on and not turn aside for any games. He began calculating how long it would take him to get to Ringwood Cottage, what they would be about when he arrived, and what they could be thinking of his long absence. Then he thought over his adventures; wondered how Fred had got on; thought he had better have taken Fred's advice, and not lain down in the cart, and so find himself carried off twelve miles from home, and have to toil along in the hot sun all alone along this dusty road, and feel so stiff and sore from having been thumped about and cramped up in the cart. And then he wondered whether he should find they had all gone out on some expedition when he got there at last, and made up his mind that this walking in the dust was very dull.

He seated himself on a stile to rest, and the sound of



JACK RIDES A RACE.

music seemed to come upon the wind. He listened, and perceiving that by crossing a field he should get nearer to it, and that perhaps he should see some fun going on, and that the club feast the girl had talked of must be going on there, he climbed the stile and crossed the field; entered a shady lane, and, turning a corner, found himself in the midst of a crowd of holiday people. There were tents and booths, flags, a band of music, swings and shows. Jack had not a penny in his pocket, so it was of no use to wish he could see a show or have a swing. Still he did wish it. He had an unconquerable love of amusement.

While he stood looking round, with his hands in his empty pockets, a great shouting and noise caught his attention, and he ran to the place. It was a donkey race that had begun. Four donkeys had started, but one had thrown his rider, and was kicking and flinging about in front of the other three. In a moment Jack seized the reins, jumped on his back, and was off amidst the applause of the spectators. His donkey kept the lead. It galloped at full speed, crossed the common, leaving all the rest far behind, turned a corner that brought him back into the high road, met a pony carriage so suddenly that the pony

reared and backed into a ditch, making a lady scream out and then took such a furious fit of kicking that Jack flew over his head into the opposite ditch ; after which happy riddance this energetic donkey galloped out of sight in a moment.

Jack scarcely touched the bottom of the ditch before he began to struggle out again, leaving portions of his green jacket sticking on brambles, and getting stings from nettles, and scratches from thorns, on face and hands. As his head rose up in the midst of a thick bunch of dock-leaves, and his eyes reached the level of the road, they met a pair of eyes peering down upon them. He stopped, with open mouth, staring and bewildered.

“ Fred ! How did you come here ? ”

“ I knew it was Jack ! ” exclaimed Fred, for he it was. “ What have you been about ? Here, give me your hand, old fellow, and let me pull you out of this ditch. ”

By Fred's help Jack clambered out, and when he was safely on the road again looked about him. The pony carriage he had run against was the well-known one from Ringwood Cottage ; his mother—with her gentle face half grieved at the sad plight he was in, half pleased to have found him—was seated in it ; and Jacob, who had

managed to save it from upsetting in the ditch, was at the pony's head. After half a minute spent in a kind of stupefied wonder at this sudden and strange meeting, every one concerned gave way to a fit of laughter. As to Fred, he was obliged to sit down on a bank and hold his sides. But the laughter was stopped by Jack. He bounded towards the carriage; jumped in by his mother; called to Fred to come—"Come this instant"—and to Jacob to drive on; and so energetic was he that every one obeyed, and they started homewards at a quick trot.

"But, Jack, I say; what have you been about?" repeated Fred. "Are you running away from anybody?"

"No; only I was riding a donkey-race, and the donkey was possessed by the furies, I believe. What has become of the brute?"

"Oh, I do not know," replied Mrs. Hastings. "We were too much engaged with our own affairs to look after him. You gave us such a reception, that we were very nearly overturned."

"And as to me," said Fred, "I was struck by the resemblance of the unlucky wight who was riding him to a certain Allan-a-Dale who went to sleep in a cart early this morning; so I saw nothing else. But after all, what

are you in such a state of mind for, and what are we driving at this rate for? and what makes you keep looking behind?"

"Oh, I don't want all the people at the games there to come shouting and laughing round us. I have made myself quite ridiculous enough one way or another without that."

They did, indeed, on looking back, see a crowd begin to appear at the corner where the adventure happened, but a turn in the road took them out of sight, and Jack began to breathe freely.

"I have lost my cap," said he, "and my hair is full of burrs; but it's well it is no worse."

"Here is your cap," said Fred. "It flew up and stuck on the branch of a tree as you dropped into the ditch, and I took it down."

"That is lucky. Thank you! and now tell me when you awoke, and how you came here."

No; they must first hear Jack's adventures, and he must account for the remarkable manner in which he made his appearance, and how he came to ride the race. So Jack had to tell his whole story, much to the amusement of his listeners. His mother was charmed with his

account of Patty and her kindness, and declared she would call on her. Fred laughed heartily again and again, and even Jacob's grave face was often seen to smile.

Fred's adventures had been much less romantic. He had been awaked about eight o'clock by a great clamour, shouting, and splashing; and after rising out of the straw, and wondering where he could possibly be, and what all the noise could mean, he had looked round for the cart. Not seeing it stand in the place where it was, and not seeing anything of Jack, he had felt so troubled that for some time he forgot the noise that was going on, and thought of nothing else but Jack, and what had become of him. So he hurried to the door of the farm-house to ask about the cart, and was told that it had started for Lyndhurst at six o'clock, driven by the farmer himself. Now, as Fred felt sure that Jack would have come to him and awoke him if he had himself awoke, he could come to no other conclusion but that which had really happened—namely, that Jack had been carried off towards Lyndhurst fast asleep; so all he could do was to get the best information he could as to the road the farmer would take, and to ask his way home.

On turning out of the farm-yard he discovered the

cause of the noise he had heard. The neighbouring farmer was having his sheep-washing; and the men were driving and dragging the poor frightened sheep into a large pond close by. A number of people were looking on; but he was so anxious to reach home that he did not stop above five minutes. He was surprised to find what a short walk brought him there. He arrived just as breakfast was ready, and glad enough he was to sit down and join.

“And what did they say about poor me?” asked Jack.

“All our talk,” replied his mother, “was about you, and how we had better proceed to find you; and the result was that Fred and I came along this road, and succeeded; though, I must say, you gave us an alarming reception.”

They had scarcely finished these questions and answers when they found themselves at the gate. They drove merrily up the avenue, and were received with joyful acclamations by every one, and as it was nearly dinner-time every one was assembled. The adventures of Robin Hood and Allan-a-Dale, as related with various embellishments and illustrations by that celebrated minstrel, afforded talk and laughter for the whole evening. As to his green dress, it was devoted to clothing a scarecrow in the garden to keep the birds off the cherries.



THE SHEEP-WASHING.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PIC-NIC.

THE long-talked-of pic-nic was still a pleasure in prospect, and now the day was fixed when it should take place. Alice decided that they should ask several of their young friends and neighbours to join them, and a large party was made up. A hill in the forest, commanding a beautiful view of the ruins of Beaulieu Abbey, was to be the place of meeting.

Nurse, assisted by Aunt Fanny, had many consultations with the cook and gardener, and preparations for an abundant feast were made. All the anxiety was that the appointed day should be fine.

And when the morning broke it was fine as heart could desire—clear, calm, and settled, without cloud or mist to create anxiety. After an early breakfast, eaten hurriedly and in high spirits, they made ready to set off. A light cart was packed with provisions and despatched, and then the company began to arrive. Pony-carriages full of happy faces, each bringing some contribution of fruit or cakes, ponies with happy-looking riders, were gathered at the door.

The appointed place was at a distance of some miles, and as they wished to keep their strength for games among the trees after dinner, they tried to find conveyances for all ; but, with all their efforts, there was a walking party left.

Harry, however, declared that he would much rather walk, and that there was a nearer way by the river than that by the road ; so that, if they started directly, they should arrive nearly as soon as the ponies and carriages could take the others. Jack also declared it was much better fun to walk, and that, by climbing a few gates and stiles, they could find a famously short way—shorter than the one Harry meant.

“ I decline you as a guide, Master Jack,” said Harry. “ Recollect Robin Hood.”

“ Yes, yes ; I knew you would say that ; but there’s no danger this time. I know the way as well as the road to our house from here.”

“ Very well. Then mind we trust to you ; but we must have no games and nonsense by the way, that we may arrive in time.”

Jack promised he would walk on with as grave and dismal a face as if he were on his way to school the first day of the quarter. The walking party consisted of Harry



THE WRONG SIDE OF THE RIVER.

and Jack, Alfred, Joe, and Charles Tyrrell, who were school companions, and little George, who, though he was only nine, was a sturdy fellow, and had never been known to complain of being tired.

It was a beautiful path. Jack had not said too much in praise of it, and he continued to walk steadily on for some time. It must be owned that they took some unnecessary leaps over bushes and gates, and so became very warm; and as the sun was very hot, they longed to see the hill. Suddenly stopping, when they thought they *must* be near it, Jack said, "I declare I forgot that the wooden bridge was carried away in the flood last autumn."

"Now, Jack!" exclaimed Harry, "what a fellow you are! Of course, we ought to have crossed at the bridge directly we started. There's nothing for it but to turn back."

The other boys threw themselves on the grass, and declared that they could not, and would not, turn back; they were tired, hot, hungry; all the fun would be over, and the dinner all eaten.

"I'll tell you what," said Alfred. "Let us swim across."

"I can't swim," cried George.

"But then I could hold you up," said Alfred, "and swim myself."

"But, then, what are we to do about our clothes?" asked Harry.

"Put stones in them, and fling them across," said Jack. "Look here."

As he spoke he pulled off his jacket, filled the pockets with stones, tied it up into a tight ball, and, taking a run, threw it with all his strength; but down it splashed into the water, and began floating down the stream. Jack was rushing in after it, but Harry held him back, exclaiming, that he would make everything he had on wet, and then what would he do?"

Poor Jack stood looking ruefully after his jacket, which might have sailed into the Channel had not a drooping branch of a willow caught it by one sleeve. There it lay, dangling and soaking in the water.

"I think," said Walter, "that though the river is deep, we might find places where we should not be out of our depth, by stepping on large stones, and then we could carry our clothes on our heads."

At this suggestion, Harry and Alfred, who were both good swimmers, undressed, and went into the water. Walter was right, and they found that, by taking a slanting direction, and taking advantage of stones and rocks, even



KITTY AND THE VILLAGE CHILDREN.



George could walk across. It was resolved, therefore, that each boy should tie up a bundle of clothes, and carry it on his head, and that Harry should swim along the line to keep all in their proper places, and to assist any that might require it. This determined on, no time was lost; the bundles were mounted on the heads, and one after another the five boys stepped carefully from stone to stone. It was easy at first, but when the water became deep, it was difficult to preserve their balance. At the deepest part, poor little George slipped off a stone, and lost his footing; but Harry held him tight, and dragged him safe to the bank, sinking again and again, and swallowing great quantities of water. This was the only disaster, for George had no bundle to carry; the others had distributed his clothes and Harry's among them.

Jack's wet jacket was extricated from the willow the first thing. He wrung it out, and stretched it on the grass to dry, and they all began to dress as fast as they could.

Meanwhile, the party was collected on the hill. The ponies were taken out of the carriages, and turned out to graze, and the cart was in process of unloading. Alice and Mary took charge of each parcel as the boys brought it; as to the other girls, they went in different directions to

find wild flowers, that they might make bouquets, and dress the table-cloth prettily. Little Kitty was very successful at this work. She fell in with a party of village children, who helped her to reach beautiful honeysuckles, wild roses, and sweet briar, from the trees and hedges that she could not have reached, and when she went back with her frock full of her treasures, she asked to have it filled with cakes, with which she ran back to her friends who had helped her.

It seemed a long time before the walking party arrived, and many excursions were made to the top of the hill to look out for them.

“ I do hope they have not lost their way,” said one.

“ It will be so unlucky, if they have,” cried another.

“ Does any one know which way they decided to take at last?” asked Alice.

Fred answered that he knew they were determined to keep by the path on the opposite side of the river, as Jack said it was much the shortest.

Alice was emptying a basket of cherries. She let them all drop, and looked up in consternation.

“ Why, there is no bridge there now,” said she.

“ What will they do?” said Constance.



LAYING THE TABLE.

“Run down the path to the river side, and look whether they are there waiting, and let us think what can be done,” said Alice.

Several set off to reach the river side, but as they went on they began to fancy they heard voices approaching. Soon it became certain, and in a few minutes they met the six boys, and all returned together in triumph to Alice, who, hearing them coming, had taken her seat, while the finishing strokes were being put to the arrangement of the dishes by the others. This pleasant sight met the eyes of the advancing party as they made their way through the trees.

Of course, Jack was laughed at a good deal for his blunder, but he declared it was a most fortunate choice he made. In the first place, he said, the way was much the shortest—all must agree to that; in the next place, the wading through the river was both fun and refreshment; and lastly, his necessity to carry his wet jacket over his shoulders on a stick, had made him cool and comfortable.


This speech produced a great deal of laughter, and the feast began merrily. Every one enjoyed it to the utmost, and after it was over, and everything cleared away, they had games, singing, and forfeits, till it was time to go home. The pic-nic had been very successful, and very pleasant.

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL TO THE FOREST.

THE day had come when it was fixed that the happy party at Ringwood Cottage must break up. Many a pleasant recollection would every one that had been there keep of the time that had passed, and many a promise was made that next summer they should meet again, and enjoy another month in the forest.

There was much to be done on this last day. While Mary packed up ready for the journey, Kitty went with Alice to feed the poultry, and bid good-bye to the "poor little dears," as she called them. Alice then filled a basket with fresh eggs, and gave it to Kitty to take to her mamma. Afterwards they went to the garden and gathered a splendid bouquet of flowers, also to go to London. Kitty ran up to Mary, and made her come down to see them.





KITTY AND ALICE FEEDING THE POULTRY.

“Will not mamma be delighted with them? Look at these roses! We have picked some of every kind that are out. Are not these white ones lovely? There are fifteen in that one bunch. And only smell these pink beauties! They are called Madame Laffey. Then look at the cloves, and the mignonette, and the honeysuckle, and the sweet peas—and all the others—I forget their names. Fancy how sweet the drawing-room will be, and how mamma will look when we open the basket and show her what is in it.

Mary was as happy as Kitty to take these treasures to her mamma, and thanked Alice for thinking of it. As they were going in they met the gardener with more treasures. He was carrying in two baskets, one filled with strawberries—nearly the last of the season; the other, with cherries for them. They were glad their mamma would taste some of the same fruit that she had heard of in their descriptions of their pleasant parties; and the pleasure they felt in taking all these gifts from the country to her, made them half forget the pain of leaving it.

But besides all this, a letter came from Mrs. Murray before the hour that the train started to invite every one

to London for the Christmas holidays. It was a joyous hope. A certainty it could not become till parents were consulted, and leave obtained; but it was a hope that softened the parting, and, together with the thoughts of the meeting with their mamma which was coming, sent our Londoners on their way with bright faces, even after saying farewell to the forest.

THE END.

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